

FactCheck



Irakli Gharibashvili: “I propose to make a constitutional change by including the definition that a family is the union of a man and a woman. Latvia did the same, as well as Croatia before entering the EU last year.”

Mari OTIASHVILI
FactCheck

On 28 March 2014, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, declared at the sitting of the Government of Georgia: “I propose to make a constitutional change by including the definition that a family [later on, representatives of the Georgian Dream coalition explained that the Prime Minister meant marriage instead of family] is the union of a man and a woman. Latvia did the same, as well as Croatia before entering the EU last year. Despite the current legislation of Georgia envisaging a family as being the union of a man and a woman, in order to avoid any misinterpretation, I believe a constitutional amendment is necessary. This legislation would neither establish any new rights for anyone nor privilege any part of society. It ensures the possibility for all of us to benefit from the already existing right provided by the Georgian legislation. This is the right of our nation to make this amendment to the Constitution.” (Source: civil.ge)

FactCheck looked deeper into the statement of the Prime Minister to investigate its accuracy.

Latvia joined the European Union on 1 May 2013, while Croatia did the same on 1 July 2013.

Before 2005, Article 110 of the Constitution of Latvia read as follows: “The state should protect and support marriage, family, the rights of parents and the rights of a child.” On 15 September 2005, the ruling party of Latvia proposed the constitutional amendment that would create the constitutional grounds for avoiding same-sex marriages in the future. The proposition was supported by two-thirds of the members of the Parliament of Latvia and Article 110 of the Constitution was adapted into the following: “The State shall protect and support marriage – a union between a man and a woman, family, the rights of parents and the rights of a child...”

CONCLUSION

Irakli Gharibashvili's statement concerning the legislative changes in the definition of marriage introduced in Latvia and Croatia is correct. However, the Prime Minister wrongly asserts that Croatia made the aforementioned constitutional changes before becoming an EU member. Croatia has introduced the constitutional amendments since January 2013 after seven months of EU membership.

Of particular note is the fact that the leaders of the ruling socialist coalition of Croatia, President, Ivo Josipović, and Prime Minister, Zoran Milanović, supported by human rights organisations and the majority of Croatian media representatives, were opposed to the referendum and the constitutional changes. Furthermore, the Government of Croatia even proposed the legitimisation of same-sex marriages.

FactCheck concludes that the statement of the Prime Minister of Georgia: “I propose to make a constitutional change by including the definition that a family is the union of a man and a woman. Latvia did the same, as well as Croatia before entering the EU last year,” is **MOSTLY FALSE**.



Photo by Novayagazeta-ug.ru

As for Croatia, on 1 December 2013, Croatia held a referendum on which the voters decided to introduce amendments to the Constitution for redefining the definition of marriage more precisely. Before the aforementioned decision, Article 61 of the Constitution of Croatia proclaimed: “Marriage and legal relations in marriage, common-law marriage and families shall be regulated by law.” From January 2004, Article 61 of the Constitution of Croatia was formulated in the following wording: “Marriage is a union between a man and a woman.”

Rendering the aforementioned paragraph to the Constitution aimed at prohibiting same-sex marriages. The referendum on this subject was initiated by the Croatian Catholic Church and based upon the signatures of 700,000 citizens. The above-mentioned initiative was supported by the radical right-wing forces. Of note is the fact that the initiative was a backlash against the proposition of the Government of Croatia to legalise same-sex marriages.

It is also of importance to mention that the leaders of the left-wing ruling socialist coalition, President, Ivo Josipović, and Prime Minister, Zoran Milanović, supported by human rights organisations and the majority of Croatian media representatives, were opposed to the referendum and the constitutional changes. The President of Croatia declared that marriage was already defined by the legislation of Croatia. The question posed at the referendum (regardless of the referendum results) contained

a discriminatory message; in addition, holding the referendum of this sort only meant the squandering of taxpayers' resources. According to the statement of Prime Minister Milanović, the aforementioned referendum enabled the majority to deprive the minorities of their rights.

Croatia has had the Family Act since 2003. The provision of Article 5 of the Family Act lays down the legal definition of marriage. According to it, marriage is a life union of a woman and a man regulated by the law. As for the legislation of Georgia, based upon Article 3 of the Law of Georgia on Marriage and Regulating Post-Marital Relationship, a couple can consist of a woman and a man and the current law concerns only couples of the opposite sex.

Despite the resistance of the supreme officials, Croatia still held a referendum. In November 2013, 104 members of the Croatian Parliament, out of 151, supported the aforementioned referendum. To the question of the referendum: “Do you agree with the proposition that marriage is a union between a man and a woman?”, 65% of the population responded positively while 34% were opposed.

The aforementioned referendum and the constitutional amendments were followed by negative international response. As concerns the European Union, no official statement has been issued on the subject of the Croatian referendum. According to the declaration of the European Commission the definition of marriage is a national competence.



More Than 1 Million Georgians Abroad

The FINANCIAL
By MARIAM GOGIBERIDZE

“According to statistics on migration, more than one million citizens of Georgia are currently outside the country,” Adeline Braux, Researcher at the French Institute of Anatolian Studies (IFEA-Istanbul), in charge of the Caucasus branch (Baku), told The FINANCIAL. “In the year 2011 alone, citizens of Georgia passed the border with Turkey one million times. Circular migration to a large extent is independent from Georgia, but migrants will take advantage of this opportunity to go somewhere then come back, it allows them (especially women) not to be absent, from home, from children or from sick parents, for too long.”

“Firstly, from a purely demographic point of view, the largest outflow of the ‘90s strongly affected the size of the Georgian population,” Adeline Braux, Researcher at the French Institute of Anatolian Studies (IFEA-Istanbul), in charge of the Caucasus branch (Baku), told The FINANCIAL. “When more than one million of the population of Georgia is located abroad, this means that the country has lost nearly 20 percent of its overall population. For such a small country this is a very serious problem. It means that whole families have left, that a large segment of the working population has left, and so on. At the same time, in the post-Soviet period of transition, remittances (through banks, or basically just from hand to hand) helped many families in Georgia not to live in poverty.”

“Most often, statistics are transmitted through international organizations such as the UN, International Organization for Migration, the World Bank, UNHCR etc. The fact is that these organizations rely on the statistics provided by national statistics organizations. This does not apply only to Georgia, but also to Azerbaijan and Armenia, to mention only the countries of the South Caucasus,” she said.

“All migration specialists in the region agree that there is an absence of true data in the area of migration. There are various reasons for this, for example up until now many people have been registered as being resident in their home country, when in reality they have left. Nevertheless, the statistics show that more than one million citizens of Georgia are outside the country. In the year 2011 alone, citizens of Georgia passed the border with Turkey one million

times. This does not mean that one million people have moved from Georgia to Turkey, but nevertheless, it says a lot about the frequency of these movements,” Adeline Braux added.

“Basically the migration situation is linked with the socio-economic situation in Georgia. In the meantime, Georgia remains extremely difficult for many, with a lack of jobs, adequate healthcare and so on. The migration outflow is not as strong now as it was in the ‘90s. We must also realize that certain people to some degree move abroad because they think that, for example in Western Europe, everything will be easier and better. This is the so-called ‘desire for another place’, or ‘we are well, where we are not’,” she added.

“It is not quite accurate to say that ‘Georgia will become a country of circular migration’, circular migration is not signing a contract. This is a type of phenomena in the area of migration. And by the way, for Georgia, it already exists. But circular migration, however, is highly dependent on the policies in the field of migration. Turkey is again a very good example in relation to Georgia. For Georgian citizens it is very easy to get to Turkey, and it certainly gave a strong push to Georgian migration to this country, especially now that Russia is closed to Georgian migrants. However, changes have been made to Turkish legislation recently which mean that migrants from Georgia will not be able to come, stay, leave and come back again as was possible earlier. This will certainly affect the migration processes. Circular migration to a large extent is independent from Georgia, but migrants will take advantage of this opportunity to go somewhere then come back which allows them (especially women) not to be absent, from home, from children or from sick parents, for too long,” she said.

“There are many positive and negative sides to migration for both countries, for the country where they migrate to and for the country from which they migrate,” Manana Ratiani, PHD in Geographical Sciences, expert-consultant at the National Center for Teacher Professional Development, told The FINANCIAL. “Perhaps first and foremost it should be noted that international migration is one way to eliminate inequality between countries, adding to more equal distribution of resources and opportunities. Migration is also a result of globalization, as well as a cause of speeding up globalization.”

“Countries where the number of migrant outflows is more than the inflows, face many problems. The most significant of which are unemployment, education and less of a chance of getting other social goods. This is what pushes the adult population to leave a country. Also, there may be a lack of democracy, or environmental degradation (migrants), as well as political conflicts. However, regardless of whatever kinds of reasons there may be, people are always looking for opportunities to improve their quality of life,” she said.

“Remittances can be considered positives. This is because of the fact that people send them to family members to improve their living conditions. As well as this, they help to reduce unemployment and competition in the workplace. However, a lack of competition in the workplace is not always good, it is possible for it to create a problem for employers in terms of lack of choice. Also if a brain drain takes place, then it turns out that the country has spent resources on a person's education that will benefit, and will be paying taxes to, another country, the one where they will be employed,” Ratiani added.

“As a result of migration there are also changes in the sex and age structures. A country with a great inflow of migrants will have a more working-age population. This working-age population diminishes from the country of which they migrate. There are also changes in the sex structure. Earlier when there was greater demand for industry sectors, heavy metallurgy for example, there was more demand for a male labour force. However, nowadays when there is an increasing share of the service sector in the economy, there is increased migration of women,” she said.

“The problem of migration is very real nowadays worldwide, as it is changing natural processes, altering the picture of the population. It should also be noted that the main flow is directed from developing to developed countries, which is natural as everyone wants to improve their conditions. Frequently, developed countries often impose various barriers on entering a country in order to clamp down on the migration process. The most common form of barrier is a visa regime, a multitude of processes related to visa issuance indicate a country's dependence on this

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Irakli Gharibashvili: “Georgia tripled the volume of its export to Russia. However, today, the impact of the Russian embargo would not be as grave as it was in 2006. At that time, the Georgian market was exceedingly dependent upon Russia but since then, we have expanded into new markets. Over the past year, our export to the European market has grown by 65%. This is an unprecedented indicator.”



Photo by world.fedpress.ru

Nutsa TOKHADZE
FactCheck

On 7 March 2014 the news agency *Pirveli* published the following statement of the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili: “Georgia tripled the volume of its export to Russia. In general, I believe that at this stage it is rather improbable for Russia to proclaim another unprovoked embargo on Georgia. Even if we

allow the hypothetical possibility of such an occurrence, the impact today would not be as grave as it was in 2006. At that time, the Georgian market was exceedingly dependent upon Russia but since then, we have diversified the economy and expanded into new markets. Take Europe, for instance, where over the past year our export to the European market has grown by 65%. This is an unprecedented indicator.”

FactCheck inquired about the accuracy of the given statement and verified its accuracy.

TABLE 1. TRADE BETWEEN GEORGIA AND RUSSIA (USD THOUSAND)

Years	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	2014* January
Export (To Russia)	83,839.8	104,532.8	153,724.5	75,393.3	45,338.5	29,783.4	21,146.2	34,706.5	36,610.4	45,816.0	190,242.9	21,048.0
Import (From Russia)	157,890.7	254,475.9	381,558.0	555,371.8	573,879.5	423,312.0	291,607.7	290,535.6	389,711.6	473,796.8	589,419.5	36,286.9
Foreign Trade Balance	-74,050.9	-149,943.1	-227,833.5	-479,978.6	-528,540.8	-393,528.6	-270,461.5	-255,829.1	-353,101.3	-427,980.8	-399,176.6	-15,238.8

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia – geostat.ge

As can be gathered from Table 1, over the period of 2003 to 2006 Georgia’s export to Russia was characterised by a tendency of growth. In 2006 (following the embargo) the volume of export saw precisely a twofold decline as compared to 2005. From 2006 to 2010 the export indices were decreasing whereas in the period spanning 2010 to 2013, the indicators reveal the trend of an increase. As the Prime Minister’s assertion regarding the triple growth of export is rather vague (it is unclear against which year the PM is comparing the export indicator of 2013) we analysed several possible interpretations of the statement which logically proved to be most plausible. Comparing the volume of export registered in 2013 (preliminary data) to that of 2012 we observe that the volume of export grew 4.2-fold

in 2013 which bolsters Irakli Gharibashvili’s claim about the tripling of the volume of export.

In the case if we compare the indicator of 2013 to that of 2006 (the period of imposed embar-

go and a sharp decline in the volume of export), we observe that the volume of export saw

approximately a threefold upturn which again confirms the number indicated by the Prime Minister. However, setting the indicator of 2013 against that of 2005 (the highest indicator of export to Russia prior to the introduction of the embargo), and this is considered by FactCheck as the most logical comparison, it becomes evident that the volume of export surged solely 1.2-fold in 2013. This rate of growth is much lower than the figure named by the Prime Minister but it is nevertheless to be noted that in 2013 (preliminary data) the export indicator reached the highest mark yet.

As for the volume of goods imported from Russia, it revealed a tendency of growth in the period from 2003 to 2008 whereas starting from 2008 (the aftermath of the Georgian-Russian war) up until 2011, the export indicators took a downturn. Beginning from 2011, the volume of import from Russia surges

again and this trend continues to this day (the volume of goods imported from Russia arrived at the highest indicator in 2013). As concerns Georgia’s external trade balance with Russia, it has recurrently been expressed with a negative figure over the span of many years and this holds true to this very day as well.

Albeit in 2013 the volume of Georgia’s export to Russia achieved the topmost indicator hitherto registered, 2013 was also the year with the highest volume of imported goods from Russia. As a result, the indicator of the negative external trade balance reached one of the highest marks in 2013 (USD -399 million) over the span of the past years (the negative trade balance showed the highest indicator in 2007 totalling USD -529 million). Accordingly, the largest volume of export recorded in 2013 does not entail the most favourable external trade balance for Georgia.

TABLE 2. GEORGIA’S EXTERNAL TRADE

Years	Export			Import		
	Position	% Share	Number of Countries where Georgia is Exporting	Position	% Share	Number of Countries Importing to Georgia
2003	1	18%	83	1	14%	112
2004	3	16%	79	1	14%	118
2005	1	18%	93	1	15%	120
2006	3	8%	100	1	15%	120
2007	9	4%	95	3	11%	114
2008	12	2%	94	5	7%	126
2009	10	2%	101	5	7%	121
2010	10	2%	106	6	6%	128
2011	12	2%	106	6	6%	135
2012	11	2%	112	6	6%	128
2013*	4	7%	111	4	8%	122
2014 January	4	9%	67	4	7%	87

Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia – geostat.ge

Table 2 reveals that in 2005 Russia ranked first among the 93 countries where Georgia was exporting its goods, receiving 18% of the total volume of Georgia’s exports. In 2006 (after the proclamation of the embargo) Russia drops to the third place with 8% and its indicators continue decreasing throughout the following years. As for 2013 (in line with the preliminary data), Russia’s share in the exported goods of Georgia mounts again, reaching the fourth position amidst 111 countries, revealing a notable rise from the eleventh

position occupied in 2012. The comparison of indicators from 2005 and 2013 shows that in this specific case the difference between the first and fourth positions is not particularly big given the fact that the number of countries receiving Georgian exported goods is around 100. However, it should be mentioned that Russia’s share in the total volume of goods exported from Georgia equalled 18% in 2005 but fell to 7% in 2013. This variation can be explained by the fact that the market was more diversified in 2013 and Georgia was exporting to a greater number of countries (to an additional

18 states) than in 2005. Taking into account the given circumstances (the number of countries receiving Georgia’s exported commodities, their ranking and share in the to-

tal volume of export) it can be deduced that the Prime Minister’s assertion about the less negative impact of the Russian embargo is correct.

As for the volume of Geor-

gia’s imports from Russia, in 2005 Russia was in the lead of the 120 importing countries holding 15% of the total volume of imported products. Starting from 2007 Russia is slightly

falling behind but in 2013 strengthens its positions again and moves up from the sixth position to the fourth holding 8% of the Georgian imports amidst 122 importing countries.

TABLE 3. GEORGIA’S EXPORT TO EU COUNTRIES (USD THOUSAND)

Years	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
Georgia’s Export to EU Countries	82,715.6	128,204.3	216,758.8	225,357.2	268,533.5	335,165.2	237,715.6	309,550.1	424,300.2	353,075.6	608,140.3
Variation % (Relative to Preceding Years)	30.4	55.0	69.1	4.0	19.2	24.8	-29.1	30.2	37.1	-16.8	72.2
Share of EU Countries in Total Export of Georgia	17.93	19.82	25.05	24.07	21.79	22.41	20.97	18.45	19.38	14.85	20.9

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia – geostat.ge

The table above reveals that the share of Georgia’s export to EU countries in the total volume of Georgia’s exports was characterised

with a tendency of increase from 2003 to 2006. Throughout the period between 2006 and 2012 the indices revealed certain fluctuations but, nevertheless, retained relatively high marks.

In 2013, Georgia’s export to the European market surged by 72.2% relative to 2012 (which is the highest indicator recorded over the course of the past years) while the share of Geor-

gia’s export to EU countries in the entire volume of Georgian exports equals 20.9% (returning to the average indicator of the past years). Consequently, even though in 2013 the volume

of goods exported to EU countries grew by 72.2% (the figure is even higher than indicated by the Prime Minister – 65%), its share in the total volume of Georgia’s exported products

stands at the average indicator of the past years. Therefore, 72.2% growth of export to European countries does not entail the greatest advances in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The Prime Minister’s statement regarding the tripling of exports is rather vague. The volume of Georgian export to Russia grew 4.2-fold in 2013 as compared to the indicator of 2012, 2.52-fold relative to 2006 and 1.2-fold relative to 2005.

Over the span of the period 2005-2013, the number of countries receiving exported goods increased by 18 and the share of goods exported to Russia fell from 18% down to 7%. Considering the number of countries to which Georgia is exporting, their share in the total volume of export and the ranking, today, Georgia is indeed less dependent upon Russia than was the case in 2006.

As for Georgian export to the European market, in 2013 its volume grew by 72.2% as compared to the previous year. This figure represents the highest indicator recorded over the course of the past years but in 2013 the share of exported goods in the pool of Georgia’s total exports – 20.9% equalled the calculated average indicator of the past years. Therefore, 72.2% growth of export to European countries does not imply the greatest advances in this regard.

Accordingly, we conclude that the Prime Minister’s statement: “Georgia tripled the volume of its export to Russia. In general, I believe that at this stage it is rather improbable for Russia to proclaim another unprovoked embargo on Georgia. Even if we allow the hypothetical possibility of such an occurrence, the impact today would not be as grave as it was in 2006. At that time, the Georgian market was exceedingly dependent upon Russia but since then, we have diversified the economy and expanded into new markets. Take Europe, for instance, where over the past year our export to the European market has grown by 65%. This is an unprecedented indicator,” is **HALF TRUE**.

HALF TRUE



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