

# VISA LIBERALIZATION AND THE GEORGIAN SCHOLAR MICHEL MOUSKHÉLY<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** For the first time in Georgian historiography, this study critically examines newly accessed archival documents, foreign scholarly literature, and French press materials to explore the early stage of the idea of visa liberalization and to establish the role of the Georgian scholar Michel Mouskhély in its intellectual formation.

The study aims to investigate how Mouskhély's scholarly and theoretical arguments were connected to practical political initiatives and to assess the significance of his contributions for the strategic objectives of Georgia's European integration. Michel Mouskhély (1903–1964) — a Georgian émigré jurist, professor at the University of Strasbourg, and one of the early theorists of European federalism — belongs to the rare figures whose work organically integrates the Georgian intellectual tradition with the Western academic space. His academic and public activities were devoted to the legal and institutional foundations of European unity.

M. Mouskhély (Mikheil Mushelishvili) directed the student march in his capacity as a professor at the University of Strasbourg, where he enjoyed considerable prestige. In 1932, he acquired French citizenship and integrated into the French intellectual milieu under the name Michel Mouskhély (*Journal officiel de la République française*, 22 May 1932). In July 1959, under his leadership, the Centre for Research on the U.S.S.R. and Eastern European Countries (*Centre de recherches sur l'U.R.S.S. et les pays de l'Est*) was established at the University of Strasbourg, becoming one of the foremost academic platforms for Soviet studies in Western Europe (*Revue française de sociologie*, №1-2, 1960, pp. 221–222). At the University of Strasbourg, M. Mouskhély was affectionately referred to as “our Georgian” (“Notre Géorgien”) (Excerpts from a letter by M. Pierre Winkler, Consul Général de France, 9 May, Service des archives Institut Lebel, bureau 037 H, personal file of Michel Mouskhély, University of Strasbourg).

The theoretical framework of the research is based on the legal foundations of European integration, which trace back to the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The study emphasizes that the idea of free movement is not merely the outcome of institutional development but was preceded by a series of legal norms and intellectual discourses in which Mouskhély played a particularly significant role. Special attention is given to the student march organized on August 6, 1950, at the French-German border in Saint-Germainshof, of which Mouskhély was both an initiator and ideologue. This event, whose main slogan was “Europe is the present,” symbolically represented the ideas of border removal and free movement and may be regarded as a conceptual precursor to visa liberalization.

The study also notes that the visa liberalization regime for Georgia came into effect on March 28, 2017, marking a significant achievement in the country's path toward European integration. Visa liberalization, as an instrument of contemporary European policy, should not be viewed solely as a phenomenon of the twenty-first century; it rests on earlier intellectual and political ideas to which Michel Mouskhély made a substantial contribution. This fact underscores the particular importance of Georgia's place in the historical and theoretical narrative of European integration.

**Keywords:** Visa liberalization, Georgia, European integration, Michel Mouskhély, student march.

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**Introduction.** The legal and institutional development of European integration was preceded by the intellectual formation of the idea of free movement, to which the Georgian émigré scholar, international law specialist, and Professor at the University of Strasbourg, Michel Mouskhély, made a significant contribution. Visa liberalization represents one of the key mechanisms of European integration, enabling short-term, visa-free mobility within the European Union and facilitating deeper economic, cultural, scientific, and touristic exchanges.

Of particular significance is the constitutional project developed in March 1948 by Michel Mouskhély and Gaston Stefani, which articulated the conceptual foundations of free movement and, in contemporary terminology, visa liberalization. The project specifically addressed the regulation of foreign labor migration within the territory of the federation, ensuring their free movement and equal legal status (Mouskhély, M., & Stefani, Articles 36–41). From a legal perspective, this project can be regarded as one of the earliest drafts of a European constitution, a claim substantiated by archival documentation (Lipgens, W., & Loth, W., pp. 57–64).

In 1950, at Saint-Germainshof on the Franco-German border, Mouskhély symbolically demonstrated the idea of border abolition and European unity through a student march. The organizers included, alongside Mouskhély, Professors Marcel Millet and Jean Sommier from the University of Strasbourg. This event was not merely a political gesture; it represented a peaceful social and cultural message aimed at transforming the perception of borders as rigid dividing lines. The student march sought to reconceptualize the border from a strictly sovereign boundary to a component of a unified European space.

Subsequently, the 1957 Treaty of Rome codified, at the normative level, the principle of free movement of labor and the objective of establishing a common market, thereby transforming an idea initially expressed in intellectual discourse and symbolic acts into one of the foundational pillars of European integration.

The present study examines in detail the historical context and symbolic significance of the 1950 student march. Particular attention is devoted to Michel Mouskhély's role in promoting the European idea, the representation of the events of 6 August 1950 as a pivotal symbolic act in the history of European integration, and the march's significance as an early precedent for the development of free movement and visa liberalization.

**Methods.** The study is grounded in historical-comparative and empirical methodologies, entailing a critical analysis and interpretation of the source material. Within the scope of the research, a comprehensive and intensive analysis was conducted on archival documents, press articles, presentations delivered by political actors at international conferences, as well as data from international treaties. Additionally, the study incorporates political monitoring and a comparative evaluation of factual information.

**Discussion.** The period following the end of World War II was marked by profound challenges for Europe. Germany was defeated, its territory divided into occupation zones, its economy devastated, and its political and military leadership virtually non-existent. Post-war European society was burdened by a fractured identity, far-reaching socio-political transformations, and the enduring effects of collective trauma.

In this context, students were regarded as active agents in the realization of civic principles. They contributed to shaping conceptions of social relations grounded in dignity, political responsibility, and cross-border cooperation. Against this backdrop of student activism, the Georgian émigré scholar and professor at the University of Strasbourg, Mikheil Mouskhély, recognized the crucial role of Germany in the future European integration process. In his view, the realization of the idea of European unity required not only political but also cultural and intellectual integration.

Together with his like-minded colleagues—Professors Marcel Millet and Jean Sommier—Mouskhély organized a student march at the Franco-German border. Through this initiative, young people were given the opportunity to put into practice ideas oriented toward European unity. By symbolically crossing the border, they contributed, albeit modestly, to the formation of a common European intellectual space.

On 6 August 1950, the small border locality of St. Germanshof became the focus of international attention and the European press. On that day, a European march involving approximately 300 students from nine countries took place. Its objective was the symbolic rejection of post-war national divisions and the promotion of the idea of European integration (Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 1950, p. 10). The date was deliberately chosen, as it coincided with the anniversary of the 1870 Battle of Wörth (Fröschwiller), in which the French army was defeated by the Prussian forces.

The French historian Didier Fischer notes that in the years following 1945, student associations and universities rapidly evolved into spaces of both political and social experimentation, where young people critically reassessed the structures of the nation-state and actively promoted the deepening of European cooperation and the formation of a common European identity (Fischer, D., 2000, pp. 48–52).

A detailed and visually rich account of the student march of 6 August 1950 in St. Germanshof is provided in the French illustrated magazine *Point de vue, Images du monde* (*Point de vue, Images du monde: le journal des princes d'aujourd'hui*, 1950, pp. 22–23).

On 17 August 1950, an article was published under the sensational headline "Students and Statesmen Burn the Border Posts of Europe", which lent the press coverage of the event a dramatic and symbolically charged tone. The magazine's photo report chronologically documents the movement of the demonstrators from the Haguenau Forest toward St. Germanshof and highlights the most symbolically significant and dramatic moments of the action, including the dismantling of the customs barrier—an act that represented a powerful symbolic gesture in support of European unity.

This photo report may be regarded as an important narrative source, as it not only reconstructs the chronology of the event but also illustrates how the student march was represented through contemporary media, as a public and symbolic manifestation of the idea of a united Europe.

In this context, particular importance should be attributed to the role of Mikheil Mouskhély. The photographic and textual materials published in the press clearly demonstrate that the march was not a spontaneous protest, but rather a carefully planned and symbolically orchestrated political action, within which Mouskhély occupied a central organizational position. The media coverage portrays his involvement as a practical manifestation of the European federalist idea—an expression of youth-driven initiative that was deliberately aimed at influencing the emerging discourse on European institutional integration.

It is also noteworthy that among the participants of the student action was the 20-year-old Helmut Kohl, who would later become Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (Defrance, 2022, p. 23).

The trajectory from the St. Germanshof action to contemporary European visa liberalization demonstrates that Mouskhély's ideas were, in practice, implemented through youth-driven initiatives. The appeals voiced during the event and the active engagement of students articulated a concept according to which peace in Europe could not be secured solely through a balance of power among states; rather, it required the partial transfer of sovereignty to supranational institutions (Fischer, 2001, p. 53).

The student march held on 6 August 1950 at the Franco-German border in St. Germanshof (Wissembourg region) is widely regarded as one of the most significant acts in the history of the European federalist movement. The event was not merely a symbolic dismantling of a physical barrier; it constituted a public and practical demonstration of the idea of European integration. The students showed that a Europe

grounded exclusively in the principle of unrestricted national sovereignty could not evolve into a stable and functional political union (Heister, 2015, pp. 28–30).

This event allows the issue to be examined within the framework of historical memory. The symbolic significance of the date of the student march may be analyzed through the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (“sites of memory”), developed by the French historian Pierre Nora, one of the leading theorists of collective memory. According to Nora, a “site of memory” constitutes a symbolic nexus where history and collective memory converge, thereby endowing a particular place or date with special meaning (Nora, 1989, pp. 7–9).

From this theoretical perspective, the march of 6 August 1950 may be interpreted as a “site of memory.” This date coincides with the Battle of Wörth (6 August 1870), a decisive episode of the Franco-Prussian War. The battle significantly weakened France’s military position and contributed to the process of German unification, culminating in the proclamation of the German Empire on 18 January 1871 in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. The Palace of Versailles subsequently became a symbol of European power politics. It was in this very space that, on 28 June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed, legally formalizing the end of the First World War. Thus, the same location came to symbolize both the imperial triumph of Germany and the juridical codification of its later military defeat.

Against this historical background, the student march of 1950 may be understood as an attempt to transform the conflictual memory of the past. Whereas 6 August 1870 symbolized the politics of power and the consolidation of the nation-state, 6 August 1950 came to represent the overcoming of borders and the emergence of European cooperation. The actions of the students were not limited to the dismantling of physical barriers; they also embodied an intellectual and emotional reconfiguration—an effort to reinterpret historical trauma as a foundation for a new political vision.

Based on the analysis of political theories of memory, the representation of the historical memory of the student march of 6 August 1950—particularly as reflected in press materials—demonstrates that the event was not a spontaneous occurrence, but rather an organized, premeditated, and symbolically charged political act directly linked to the transnational narrative of European unity.

In the organization of the student march, Michel Mouskhély distinguished himself not only as a leader but also as a strategist who had clearly anticipated and defined the political significance of the action. His vision encompassed: (1) the symbolic removal of European borders; (2) the promotion of the idea of European citizenship; and (3) the mobilization of youth toward the creation of a European constitution.

The student march of 6 August 1950, which aimed to support the idea of a united Europe, has retained its relevance to this day. In 2007, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, a European memorial was inaugurated in St. Germanshof, dedicated to the student march and to pro-European activism (Les Dernières Nouvelles d’Alsace, (2007, September 6).

It is also noteworthy that in 2019, sixty-nine years after the event, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) produced a documentary film on the subject of the 6 August 1950 student march (“Student Demonstration in 1950 – St. Germanshof”) (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). (2019, December 12). Student demonstration in 1950 – Landgasthof St. Germanshof [Video]. YouTube.

From the perspective of the representation of historical memory, this documentary is of particular significance. Its main protagonists, eyewitness Matthias Heister and his wife, reflect on the symbolic meaning of the march, its organizational structure, and its role in promoting European federalism. In this way, textual and audiovisual sources are integrated, offering a multidimensional perspective that underscores the role of youth in the process of European unification.

This case clearly illustrates how youthful idealism and intellectual initiative can evolve into an event that exerts a lasting influence on the political development of Europe. Mouskhély’s intellectual stance and vision,

within the broader process of shaping European federalism, became a key source of inspiration for the student movement.

**Conclusions.** Thus, the student march of 6 August 1950 evolved from a symbolic political act into a mechanism for the public legitimization of the idea of European integration. In this process, the role of Mikheil Mouskhély represents the practical realization of an intellectual concept and constitutes one of the important foundations of European federalism. M. Muskhelishvili was not merely a professor in the classroom. His role involved actively promoting the idea of European integration alongside his students. His vision became a precursor to the institutional development of European federalist ideas, further enhancing the scholarly and historical significance of the initiative.

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