



Dual Use and Military Mobility Seminar Report: Fast-tracking Military Mobility

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Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has spurred both the EU and NATO to actively support and enable their respective member states to urgently enhance military mobility ("enablement" in NATO parlance). Against this backdrop, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted the Seminar on Dual Use Capabilities and Military Mobility in February 2024 to take stock of the progress so far and look ahead. Drawing on the outcome of the seminar, this report identifies conceptual and operational gaps in the implementation of the Military Mobility Action Plan 2.0² and puts forward recommendations to maintain and leverage the political momentum.

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² "Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Action plan on military mobility 2.0," European Commission, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022JC0048&from=EN>.

1. THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

In 2018, the EU adopted the first Action Plan on Military Mobility, while its Member States pledged to develop national implementation plans, reduce the lead time for cross-border movement permissions to five working days, create a network of national POCs and conduct exercises with a military mobility aspect. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects on 'military mobility'³ and 'logistic hubs'⁴ offer a forum to streamline those activities. The military mobility envelope of the Connecting Europe Facility⁵ (CEF), although downsized from its initial ambitions, enabled the European Commission to grant 1.7 billion euros for dual-use transport infrastructure projects located on the Trans-European Transport Network⁶ (TEN-T). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 showed that further efforts were needed, which led to the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0. Yet, as pointed out by Brigadier General Katrien D'Hert of the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), more will be needed "to create a high quality and resilient transport network, supported by appropriate logistical infrastructure." As indicated in the latest Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the Action Plan 2.0⁷, the EUMS is currently mapping the priority corridors, gaps (both technical and geographic) as well as the measures required to mitigate those gaps.

On NATO's side, the planning and execution of military logistics must account for a strategic situation that is a lot more demanding than it used to be during the Cold War. The inclusion of new Allies in NATO has moved the frontier 1500 kilometres further east compared to its location before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Alliance's Reinforcement and Sustainment Network⁸ (RSN) is one of the most extensive military logistical networks in European history. Across this area, we will need to enable movement for a higher number of Allied forces than was the case during the Cold War. Securing NATO's long direct border with Russia may require 50 up to 100 brigades that will need to be transported, hosted and sustained. NATO's new force model⁹ sets a tight timeframe for reinforcing the eastern flank (i.e., 100,000 troops within ten days). Moreover, in times of crisis or war, such movements will be required in all directions, not just from the west to the east. Artificial intelligence and the extensive digitisation of critical infrastructure, capabilities and society can enhance the efficiency of military movements, but also carries risks that Member States must be prepared to mitigate. The internet provides adversaries with near-real time situational awareness of military movements.

We are currently managing this more demanding and precarious strategic situation with fewer and more fragmented resources at our disposal than before. We have lost the institutional memory to organise logistical support for the force posture that is needed to deter and defend against Russian revisionism and irredentism. Defence budgets are lower than during the Cold War. One of the prime victims of these budget cuts has been enabling capabilities, such as flatbed wagons. To offset those gaps, it has become

³ "Military Mobility (MM)," PESCO, <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/project/military-mobility/>.

⁴ "Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations (NetLogHubs)," PESCO, <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/project/network-of-logistic-hubs-in-europe-and-support-to-operations/>.

⁵ "Connecting Europe Facility," European Commission, https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/connecting-europe-facility_en.

⁶ "Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)," European Commission, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/infrastructure-and-investment/trans-european-transport-network-ten-t_en.

⁷ "Joint report to the European parliament and the council on the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0 from November 2022 to October 2023," European Commission, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0037>.

⁸ "Reinforcement and Sustainment Network on the Right Track during Spring Conference," NATO, <https://jsec.nato.int/newsroom/news-releases/jsec-reinforcement-and-sustainment-network-on-the-right-track-during-spring-conference>.

⁹ "New NATO Force Model," NATO, 2024, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf.

commonplace to outsource the transport of military goods to private companies, which comes with its own challenges. Finally, the electrification of civilian traffic puts pressure on the profitability and viability of commercial refuelling facilities, especially in sparsely populated areas. Differences between Member States in the pace and extent of electrification of military inventories may lead to different fuel requirements and undermine interoperability.

Improving military mobility must be a whole-of-government and whole-of-society effort. Military logistics depend on both civilian and military capabilities and involve both public and private actors. Whereas large-scale military movements will have unprecedented disruptive effects on civilian life and require societal buy-in, its deliverables also benefit society. Investment in transport infrastructure can be of triple use, simultaneously benefitting the EU's trade flows, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and NATO's Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area¹⁰.

However, how the whole-of-government nature of military mobility manifests itself in a Member State depends on its unique institutional ecosystem. We must map and harmonise international differences, rather than seek one-size-fits-all solutions. Further progress therefore requires coherent conceptualisation and operationalisation of various key aspects of military mobility.

2. SETTING CLEAR DEFINITIONS

The seminar revealed that EU Member States understand key concepts differently when discussing military mobility. The coherent implementation of the actions identified in the Action Plan 2.0 and beyond requires EU Member States to have a shared understanding of the legal and administrative concepts that define their actions. In other words, enhancing military mobility in an effective manner is possible only if EU Member States speak the same legal and administrative language.

i. When is a transport 'military'?

Military mobility relies heavily on commercial transportation. This raises the question of the status of civilian transport assets carrying military cargo. In practice, military convoys can comprise a mix of civilian and military personnel and cargo. This can impact the applicability of customs regulations. Member States must coordinate their national legislations to avoid unnecessary incoherence in the legal status of forces transiting international borders in the EU.

ii. How to define a state of 'crisis'?

In the continuum between peace and war, the extremes will cause the fewest problems for military mobility. In times of peace, military transports are limited and can be planned and prepared for well in advance. In times of war, administrative burdens and legislative hurdles will become largely irrelevant. The most challenging situation is the 'in-between phase'. In a crisis, such as we find ourselves in today, we face a higher demand for military movements, but without a clear-cut legal basis to prioritise military over civilian traffic. It remains a sovereign prerogative of the Member States to define their security situation, including the legal concept of 'crisis' and its legal consequences. Nonetheless, the security situations of respective Member States have become deeply interlinked. Member States must consider what can be done to collectively assess their security situation and define the specific emergency measures that apply for each threat level, including the modalities of prioritising military transport over civilian traffic.

¹⁰ "About Deter and Defence," NATO, <https://shape.nato.int/dda>.

iii. *Who is involved in military ‘mobility’?*

Military movements require not just the use of transportation infrastructure, but also various supporting capacities: logistical support, staging areas, refuelling facilities, railway operators, (cyber)security assets and so forth. Furthermore, the governmental bodies involved in each EU Member State differ. This makes it difficult to identify international and cross-departmental interlocutors and build up working relations. Moreover, the experience and networks that have been built up through exercises and operations are likely to disappear when individual staff members change. While the Member States’ Ministries of Defence have poured a lot of effort into coordinating their activities within the two involved PESCO projects (‘military mobility’ and ‘logistic hubs’), a more comprehensive international coordinating body is needed to complement and support NATO’s Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) by developing mutual trust as well as shared cultures and procedures across all involved institutions and governmental departments. Moreover, a permanent institution would build up and maintain long-term institutional memory after the PESCO projects have reached full operational capability. This institution does not need to fall under the EU or NATO, but could have a *sui generis* status, similar to that of the Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. The latter sets a precedent that shows that difficulties can be overcome when institutional goals and national interests align. But this requires concrete and explicit buy-in from all Member States.

3. The need for coherent operationalisation of Military Mobility

When putting military mobility in practice, the devil is in the details. We must consider how to improve military mobility in a way that is coherent and tailored to our strategic goals to de-escalate the war in Ukraine and stop tensions from spreading further across Eastern Europe. First, the ability to rapidly move additional troops to NATO’s and the EU’s eastern flank maximises our deterrence. Second, our ability to scale up our force posture quickly and reliably will help reassure the EU Member States on the eastern flank. As a result, enhancing military mobility enables a more equitable distribution of the costs of remilitarisation between EU Member States. This also minimises any unnecessary threat perception emanating from a NATO force posture that leans too far forward.

i. *Preparing to absorb more infrastructure investments*

It is important to stress that each EU Member State remains primarily responsible for investing in its own infrastructure, and that military requirements and priority corridors must be considered in national investment decisions. However, building the connections between respective national plans requires additional EU funding. Although the CEF’s military mobility envelope has been spent on the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027¹¹, negotiations on the next MFF will start soon. Whereas the commitment to further enhance military mobility was reiterated in the Grenada Declaration of 2023, it is vital that EU Member States negotiate the new MFF with a full overview of the identified needs. The EUMS must therefore complete the identification of the priority military corridors, the technical and geographical gaps as well as the additional actions and funds required to mitigate those gaps as soon as possible.

¹¹ “2021-2027 long-term EU budget & NextGenerationEU,” European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027_en.

In the short term, EU Member States should leverage alternative mechanisms and formats that are available to finance investments. This includes, in particular, the European Investment Bank's (EIB) Strategic European Security Initiative¹² (SESI), which aims to bolster security and defence by providing 8 billion euros worth of repayable loans for the period 2022-2027. In that regard, Member States should ensure that risk policies maintained by the EIB and the private banking sector do not categorically exclude military mobility projects. Furthermore, the depletion of the CEF's military mobility envelope does not preclude Member States from leveraging the civilian parts of the TEN-T to indirectly enhance military mobility. Other opportunities include the Global Gateway, in order to enhance connectivity with allied third countries, funding under the proposed European Defence Industry Programme¹³ (EDIP) and the Solidarity Lanes to Ukraine.

ii. Jointly developing enabling capabilities

The return of war to our continent has rekindled the need for enabling capabilities. We must incentivise and streamline the joint development and procurement of enabling capabilities. We can draw lessons from the Defence Investment Gaps Analysis and Way Forward¹⁴ and European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act¹⁵ (EDIRPA) Regulation. By buying the necessary capabilities together, Member States can unlock advantages of scale and ensure interoperability of their inventories. In this regard, EU Member States must work together to ensure that the new procurement rules and dedicated budget under the proposed EDIP, and the European Defence Fund (EDF) can be used to support collaborative acquisition of enabling capabilities. Member States must explicitly commit to coordinate their use of these instruments to enhance military mobility.

iii. Harmonising infrastructure plans

In principle, investments in transport and logistical infrastructure can be of triple use. It can facilitate trade flows, embolden CSDP and enable NATO's force posture. When it comes to operationalising military mobility, we must synchronise the EU's TEN-T, the EUMS Military Network and JSEC's RSN. The TEN-T focuses on specific geographic areas to invest in dual-use infrastructure projects. However, it excludes military-only infrastructure (e.g., harbours with military (un)loading facilities). The scope of the CEF military mobility envelope must be expanded to cover last-mile connections to military transport and logistics nodes. Its allocation must specifically target transnational gaps between corridors. Whereas the 2019 gap analysis by the EUMS and the European Commission showed that the EU's Military Network overlapped for 93% with the TEN-T, it remains difficult to map the gaps between the EU and NATO networks because the latter's plans are classified. While JSEC, the EUMS and the European Commission coordinate their policy documents within the room of manoeuvre available to them, the inability to mutually share classified information poses a major challenge. Therefore, the transnational harmonisation of military-only corridors depends on the willingness of nations to share classified information about their logistical network with each other.

¹² "Strategic European Security Initiative," EIB, <https://www.eib.org/en/projects/topics/innovation-digital-and-human-capital/sesi/index>.

¹³ "European Defence Industry Programme," European Commission, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/edip-future-defence_en#:~:text=The%20European%20Defence%20Industry%20Programme,over%20the%20period%202025%2D2027.

¹⁴ "Joint Communication on the Defence Investment Gaps Analysis and Way Forward," European Commission, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c0a8dcda-d7bf-11ec-a95f-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF; and its Annex, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c0a8dcda-d7bf-11ec-a95f-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_2&format=PDF.

¹⁵ "European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act (EDIRPA)," European Parliament, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)739294](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)739294).

iv. Further reducing regulatory barriers

Regulatory barriers continue to impede military mobility. The Technical Arrangements concluded within the European Defence Agency (EDA) framework to standardise cross-border movement permissions for land, air and sea movement must urgently be tested and optimised, so that they can be implemented at the national level. As to customs procedures, the equivalence between the NATO and EU form 302, which allow passage of military goods through the EU customs territory, must be maintained in both form and procedure. Efforts to digitise the EU form 302 must not result in new divergences between the EU and NATO form and national customs authorities must be involved in such efforts to ensure that both forms are applied in a harmonised way. Furthermore, non-customs regulatory barriers including laws governing the intra-EU transfer and transit of defence-related products should be harmonised further. In this regard, EU Member States must ensure that the 2025 evaluation of EU Directive 2009/43 on defence transfers, as announced in the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)¹⁶, takes military mobility needs into account. Finally, the seminar showed that there is a need to train regulatory procedures through tabletop exercises, command-post exercises as well as planned and snap real-world exercises to build up expertise and identify further gaps.

v. Better information sharing and avoiding duplication

Information sharing is a challenge in military mobility both on the operational and strategic level. Differences in the classification cultures between NATO and the EU, as well as bilateral issues between their respective members, preclude the sharing of plans and complicate streamlined flows of information. Recurrent information sharing is also required between the two PESCO projects involved. Too often, the exchange of information relies on personal relations between individual staff members. Enduring cooperation and the long-term retention of lessons learnt during exercises and operations requires the expansion and formalisation of interinstitutional, international and interdepartmental working relations. Therefore, a comprehensive and permanent information sharing platform must be considered (e.g., as part of a Centre of Excellence for Military Mobility). Finally, the resilience of information sharing mechanisms will depend on close and recurrent cooperation with the EU's future Cyber Defence Coordination Centre (EUCDCC).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Military mobility can serve our strategic goals to de-escalate the war in Ukraine and surging tensions in the wider eastern European region. It enables the equitable distribution of the burdens of remilitarisation and can increase our deterrence while minimising the need for an unnecessarily threatening force posture on our eastern flank. The EU and its Member States must invest further in infrastructure and enabling capabilities. They must do this coherently and carefully, tailored to the regional situation. This requires several additional commitments by the Member States to:

1. reach a common working definition of a “military” movement, especially with regard to mixed transports consisting of both military and civilian assets and personnel.
2. define gradual levels of urgency that can be streamlined in EU and Member State law to modulate the applicable legal and administrative procedures to execute movements.

¹⁶ “European Defence Industrial Strategy,” European Commission, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/edis-our-common-defence-industrial-strategy_en.

3. establish a directory of governmental and non-governmental actors involved in military mobility, coordinating authorities and enabling capabilities on the national and international level. Member States must contribute to the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Military Mobility, as a *sui generis* body outside of the EU and NATO, to support JSEC.
4. secure more ambitious public and private investments in military transport and logistical infrastructure projects and create a screening mechanism to allocate these resources to the projects that contribute most to the efficiency of military movements. The CEF's military mobility envelope under the next MFF must be increased and expanded to include military-only infrastructure projects. The EIB's lending policy must allow investments in single-use defence projects.
5. leverage the EDF and the proposed EDIP to coordinate the development and acquisition of new enabling capabilities. Member States must ensure that the electrification of civilian traffic does not degrade the availability of refuelling facilities for foreign military transports, and that the introduction of electric military platforms in national inventories is compatible with the refuelling facilities in other Member States.
6. further align the corridors and technical characteristics of NATO's RSN, the European Commission's TEN-T and the EU Military Network. Member States must identify their national priority corridors and seek to mitigate transnational gaps through dedicated coordination formats that can draw inspiration from either RSN or TEN-T.
7. further harmonise and digitise regulatory procedures in the intra-EU movement of military products. Member States must treat the EU and NATO versions of customs form 302 as equivalent and must test, optimise and implement the Technical Arrangements for land, air and sea.
8. commit to recurrent tabletop, command-post, war gaming and live exercises to develop and train the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to military mobility on the operational level, paying particular attention to the opportunities and risks associated with the digital aspects of infrastructure, capabilities and procedures.

To enable these changes, military mobility must remain an agenda item on the European Council level. In line with the Versailles and Grenada Declarations, Member States must renew their military mobility pledges and start work on the third action plan with lessons learnt, clearer objectives and measurable performance indicators.



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