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Military mobility 2.0 revisited: Lessons learnt

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine outlined the importance of military mobility in times of crisis. It also showed how crucial it is to simplify and harmonise procedures of moving military assets and equipment across EU and NATO member states. Military mobility is a paramount enabler for the EU's security and defence in both the short and long-term.

The EU and NATO have taken important steps to enhance mobility in the past two years and a half. Military mobility is a particular domain where NATO and the EU jointly complement each other. While NATO deals with the movement of military equipment, the EU has a larger focus on legal, regulatory issues and the development of transport infrastructure that has both civilian and military use. Hence, close cooperation and coordination between the two organisations is essential to generate progress on military mobility on the European continent.

As the EU enters a new policy cycle, the war in Ukraine continues to rage on, and calls from several military and political leaders across member states highlighting a potential direct Russian attack in the next three to five years are mounting. Discussions about further enhancing the role of the EU in security and defence will be high on the agenda of the EU and its member states, with military mobility taking a central place.

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In the Policy Brief "Advancing military mobility in Europe: An uphill battle"¹, published in April 2023, we outlined EU efforts to enhance military mobility focusing on the EU Action plan 2.0. This Paper aims to take stock of developments and new initiatives at EU level since the launch of the Action plan 2.0. It also looks at efforts undertaken at the national and regional levels to advance military mobility and highlights local and regional best practices. The Policy Brief will also put forward a series of recommendations that will lay the groundwork to enhance military mobility in Europe.

As part of the research for this project, multiple interviews and discussions were conducted with EU officials, practitioners working on issues related to military mobility from several EU member states and experts from academia and think tanks conducting research on the topic.

FROM ACTION PLAN 2.0 TO A NEW MILITARY MOBILITY PLEDGE

Since the publication of the Action plan 2.0, military mobility has gained further momentum on the EU political agenda.

The one-year Report on implementation of the Action plan 2.0² published in November 2023 tracked progress across many areas, such as the initiation of a study to identify possibilities for short-notice large-scale movements, improving fuel resilience, long-term infrastructure planning, and optimal use of infrastructure. The report highlighted advancements with calls for co-funding dual-use transport infrastructure through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), with three calls undertaken.

Referenced in the report is the decision of the Council to adopt in October 2023 the revised military requirements including the Annex II “Multi-Modal Transport Corridors” to bring the standards of the trans-European transport network and the EU military transport network closer together. The report also mentions the first ‘annual event’ on military mobility held in June 2023, under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency of the EU. In January 2024, the results of the 3rd call for co-funding dual-use transport infrastructure projects through CEF were announced. In total, for the three calls, the Commission supported 95 military mobility projects with €1.74 billion.³ The available budget has been exhausted.

A further notable development was the signing of a trilateral agreement to establish a corridor for military mobility⁴ in late January 2024 by the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. The aim of the agreement is to speed up processes and simplify procedures.

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The Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defence approved by the Council at the meeting held on 27 May 2024 include a new military mobility pledge that member states are urged to implement by 2026. The Conclusions also reiterate that efforts both at EU and national levels are needed to strengthen military mobility.

The EU-NATO 9th progress report published in June 2024 pointed out the continuation of the enhanced EU-NATO dialogue on military mobility with specific focus on areas such as military requirements, transport infrastructure, transport of dangerous goods, customs, cross-border movement permissions and relevant exercises, and host nation support. The report also highlights the continued NATO staff participation in the coordination meetings of the PESCO projects Military Mobility and Network of Logistical Hubs in Europe as well as participation of EU and NATO officials in conferences on military mobility organised by the two organisations.⁶

In June 2024 the Council of the EU adopted a revised regulation regarding EU guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) that contains key aspects that will enhance military mobility.⁷

Another significant development took place in July 2024 when Romania, Bulgaria and Greece signed an agreement to speed up cross border movement of troops and equipment by “enhancing transport corridors to respond to military mobility needs, by creating road and rail supply lines between the participating states, reducing peace time bureaucracy and maximising efficiency in case of emergency situations”.⁸

Table 1. Military Mobility Pledge 2024 ⁵ (Key commitments)
Prioritise transport dual-use infrastructure investments, by applying the ‘Military Requirements for Military Mobility within and beyond the EU’, with a view to urgently completing the EU priority corridors for large-scale and short-notice military movements.
Grant cross-border movement permissions within a maximum of three working days, while acknowledging that achieving this objective requires substantial efforts at national level, in particular regarding over-sized cargo and dangerous goods.
Advance efforts to consolidate coordination and cooperation mechanisms (...) i.e. setting up an inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordination group at national level, in line with the whole-of-government approach.
Encourage Member States to share information and best practices on cooperation within strategic corridors.
Strengthen the overall resilience in all domains related to the transport sector, including cyber security.
Support and conduct exercises to test cross-border military movements in all domains.
Support ongoing initiatives to digitise military related customs formalities to reduce the administrative burden on the movement of troops and materiel from and to the customs territory of the Union.

TIMELINE OF LATEST DEVELOPMENTS



Headway in the implementation process of existing initiatives together with concrete new commitments such as the new military mobility pledge show clear progress at the EU level since the Action plan 2.0 was presented. Military mobility has gained more importance and it is recognised across the spectrum as an essential component of EU's security and defence. The creation of military mobility corridors represents a breakthrough by the member states.

Moving ahead, there are several challenges to be expected:

- The 2026 deadline for meeting the military mobility pledge brings open questions about the ability to deliver in a limited time span. It's the efforts of the member states that ultimately advance military mobility and these largely depend on the existent political will.
- There seems to be no clear vision after the 2026 deadline. Should EU actions focus more on infrastructure and connectivity where the EU can bring the biggest added value? Should the EU already envisage an Action plan 3.0 which focuses on a smaller number of priorities, concrete actions and implementation procedures?
- There are many challenges in the funding sphere that need to be addressed urgently, such as the current lack of funding at EU level and the potential level of funding in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). If the next MFF does not include a significant envelope on military mobility, then progress made might be hindered and the pledge might remain relevant only on paper.

PERSPECTIVES FROM MEMBER STATES

Understanding the importance of strengthening military mobility and political support have significantly increased across EU member states since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The role of the EU in enhancing military mobility and its efforts are widely recognised and welcome. At the same time, officials and experts have highlighted the

discrepancy that exists at the EU level between political declarations and concrete support for enhancing military mobility (financial for instance). This points to the importance of constantly undertaking a reality check regarding where the EU and the member states are with progress on military mobility, what are the challenges and what are the lessons learnt so far.

Multistakeholder platforms at national level - Efforts to advance military mobility in some member states are taking place at a higher pace than in others. This is partly due to the fact that the strategic thinking about military mobility occurs in silos and there is limited cooperation among stakeholders at national level. The Lithuanian and the Finnish cases stand out among the best practices that overcome these challenges:

- Cooperation between national stakeholders in Lithuania (ministry of defence, transportation, and others) takes place naturally based on the general understanding of the need to have a whole of government approach and the urgency to enhance military mobility.
- The whole of government Finnish model is an approach undertaken in many policy areas for decades. Finland has set up a National Coordination Group on military mobility since 2018 that comprises of ministries and governmental agencies. Any government entity or local level administration structure can be invited to join based on needs and relevance.

A regional approach to enhancing military mobility is proving to be an efficient method on the European continent. Efforts undertaken in regional platforms provide important lessons learnt and opportunities for further cooperation. For instance, in NORDEFECO, improving the capability to receive and move military units and equipment has been a key priority with the long-term goal of 'Seamless Logistics in a Borderless Nordic'.⁹ The NORDEFECO Vision 2030 emphasises military mobility as a vital enabler and outlines that Nordic cooperation will ensure minimal restrictions of movement of military equipment and units.¹⁰ Aligning priorities and improved cooperation with NATO and EU is also high on the agenda. Paramount to supporting

the regional approach is, at the same time, enhancing cooperation between neighbouring countries to advance military mobility.

Future of EU funding - While member states have welcomed the CEF envelope for military mobility, more funds are needed at the EU level for developing or upgrading transport infrastructure. Continuing CEF Calls for projects with an expanded budget in the next MFF is essential to ensure consistency in funding streams.

Some member states such as Finland recognised the benefits of EU CEF funding from the start and established a multistakeholder national application process involving different government actors and agencies. The smooth cooperation process between the ministry of defence and other institutions, the national strategic culture and the relatively small administration contributed to a whole of government approach and breaking silos thinking. Raising awareness among ministries, agencies, and other stakeholders created new synergies for cross-cooperation.

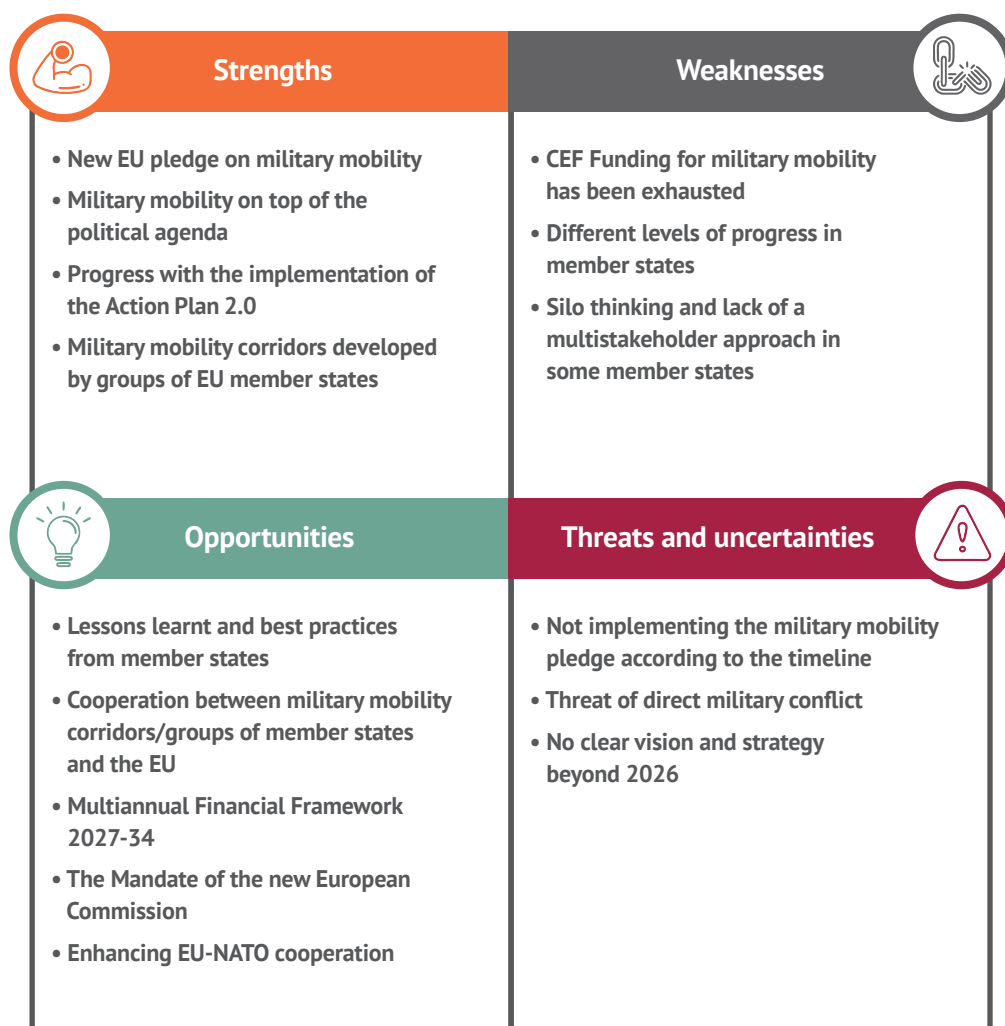
Member states have drawn lessons from the calls for funding and it would be a good idea to integrate their feedback in future calls.

A future approach of EU funding for military mobility could combine direct awarding of funding together with public calls, instead of using only public calls as it was the case with the current CEF funding. In addition, prioritising the geopolitical angle and connectivity of the projects funded through CEF would be an added value to the efforts to enhance military mobility.

The EU funding needs to be complemented by **national funding commitments**. However, developing funding lines at the national level for military mobility is a challenge faced across EU member states due to limited economic capacity to develop infrastructure. Maintaining the current network also requires significant resources. Alternative transport routes outside of the TENT are not covered by European funding and require national funding.

Fig. 2

MILITARY MOBILITY IN EUROPE SWOT ANALYSIS 2.0



A good example to raise funds at the national level is Lithuania. The adoption of the law on solidarity contribution has allowed the Lithuanian government to form an investment package for military mobility and military infrastructure for 2023-2025.¹¹

EU-NATO cooperation on military mobility has been hailed as a flagship project between the two organisations yielding concrete results. This is not without challenges or avenues to enhance cooperation. There is room for EU to improve information exchange with NATO to make sure EU actions fully complement NATO and avoid duplication. In addition, military mobility should be part of all high-level exchanges between EU and NATO.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement the new military mobility pledge according to the timeline and forge a vision that extends beyond the 2026 deadline – this will necessitate political will from the member states, significant EU funding supplemented by national level funding, and developing a strategy at the EU level with concrete steps to boost military mobility over a longer period after 2026.

2. Explain and create more awareness of EU actions and initiatives on military mobility in EU member states – this could be done through organising multistakeholder meetings in EU capitals involving a variety of actors from ministries (such as defence, transport, finance, etc.), national agencies, administrations of regions and the private sector and EU officials.

3. More regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives on military mobility are required on the European continent – forging new initiatives on military mobility in regional cooperation formats can significantly help reduce bureaucracy, connect transport infrastructure and develop joint projects. The corridors set up by Netherlands - Germany - Poland and Greece - Bulgaria - Romania represent good examples.

4. Share best practices and lessons learnt that could be applied by other member states

- The Finnish whole of government approach provides a very valuable example of cooperation across multiple areas with a variety of actors from the military mobility nexus;
- Lithuania's special fund for military mobility based on the solidarity tax provides a best practice of raising funds at national level for military mobility.

5. The EU future funding for military mobility should be increased and take into account the following:

- Integrate the feedback and lessons learnt from the member states;
- Take into account geopolitical considerations and connectivity between projects in awarding funds;
- Combine direct awarding of funding with public calls;
- The need of consistency in the approach to financing.

6. Organise trilateral exchanges between EU, NATO, and the groups of EU countries that create military mobility corridors to enhance cooperation - connecting regional corridors and setting up cooperation in this format has the potential to be a further game changer.

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 - ⁵ Council of the EU (2024), "[Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defence](#)", Bruxelles, 9225/24.
 - ⁶ Council of the European Union, "[EU-NATO: 9th progress report stresses the importance of ever closer cooperation at a key juncture for Euro-Atlantic security](#)", (accessed 9 August 2024).
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 - ¹⁰ Government Offices of Sweden, "[Joint vision to enhance Nordic defence cooperation](#)", accessed (4 September 2024).
 - ¹¹ Stankevičius, Augustas, "[Lithuania allocates €276m from borrowed funds for military mobility projects](#)", LRT, 26 July 2023.

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