

Moving Towards the Speed of Relevance? Report Summary

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This memo summarises the contents of the report *Moving Towards the Speed of Relevance? Assessing Military Mobility in the Netherlands, Germany and Poland* (FOI-R--5870—SE).

After decades of underinvestment in defence, Europe is scrambling to catch up. While much attention has been dedicated to rearmament, military logistics is of equally critical importance in this regard. Since 2014, NATO and the EU have been working together to improve the movement of military forces and equipment across Europe, with intensified efforts since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Detering Russia and defending NATO's eastern flank can only be achieved if the right forces and equipment can reach the right place at the right time.

FOUR TYPES OF societal and organisational resources are key to ensuring swift and efficient military mobility: *infrastructure, (lift) capabilities, authorities and legislation, and command and control*. Despite ongoing efforts, serious challenges persist in each of these dimensions across the continent. This study explores military mobility through a case study of the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland. Together, the three countries form a region of geostrategic importance in Europe, and they have also actively taken on leading roles in promoting military mobility. Notably, in early 2024 they established the first European Military Mobility Area (MMA). The MMA aims to facilitate and harmonise cross-border movement and serves as a model for similar efforts presently underway across Europe.

The Dutch–German–Polish Military Mobility Area

The Dutch–German–Polish MMA has prioritised harmonising rules and procedures to facilitate faster military movement across national borders. A dedicated working group (WG), comprising representatives from the three countries, has focused its work on four dimensions corresponding to key elements of military mobility: cross-border and transit procedures, availability of movement assets, information exchange, and infrastructure synchronisation. Over eighteen months, the WG developed recommendations on 20 issues, with a strong emphasis on administrative and legal procedures, as these remain strong barriers to efficient movement.

By autumn 2025, more than half of the recommendations were being implemented, but progress was hindered by national caveats and the need for extensive interministerial coordination. The lack of a supra-national monitoring mechanism further hampered coordination and implementation, revealing the need for clearer top-down guidance from the EU and NATO. Despite these challenges, the MMA's bottom-up approach has inspired wider cooperation. The MMA between the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland will thus be extended to Belgium, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Slovakia, thereby transforming into a new Central Northern MMA.

Military mobility in the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland: The state of play

In terms of *infrastructure*, the three countries under scrutiny have different roles for deterrence and defence in Europe, and they also face somewhat different challenges. The Netherlands plays a key part in the movement of troops and military equipment in and out of the continent, as Dutch ports are key points of disembarkation and further transit for transatlantic NATO troops. Dutch maritime and rail infrastructure is thus of central importance. While well developed, it is also in need of maintenance in coming years. Meanwhile, Germany's position in the middle of Europe makes it a NATO logistical hub and a key transit area in all directions on the continent. The German rail and road networks are extensive, but especially the rail domain suffers from

a significant renovation backlog; much of the infrastructure does not meet military needs. Finally, Poland is a destination country for Allied operations in the event of a conflict. Its infrastructure has gone through great modernisation since its entry into the European Union in 2004, with the highway network especially prioritised. However, railways and local infrastructure in rural areas lag behind in development.

Regarding *capabilities*, the study focuses on two vital assets: rolling stocks and fuel supply. Both the Netherlands and Germany have their own fleet of wagons for transporting military equipment and goods. Although Dutch rolling stock is extensive by European standards, the numbers are estimated to be far too low relative to the needs in a conflict. Reliance on commercial providers is substantial and requires extensive advance planning. Poland is largely reliant on commercial providers, although it is in the process of purchasing its own wagons. In terms of fuel supply, the Netherlands and western Germany are relatively well served by the NATO Pipeline System. The Netherlands also has the largest fuel storage capacity in Europe after France. Meanwhile, eastern Germany and Poland currently secure fuel by road and rail transport, and Poland relies on civilian fuel storage.

Authorities and legislation are a central element of military mobility in Europe, as transport from west to east entails crossing several national borders. Military cross-border movement generally involves a several steps for each one-way passage and country: a diplomatic clearance to enter the country, a road movement bid to transit the country, a permit for overweight and oversized cargo, and a customs declaration for the movement of military goods across borders. Countries may also require further detailed information and additional permits for the transport. Processing timeframes may be extensive, with for instance, German authorities requiring 20 working days for most oversized and overweight transports compared with NATO's recommended general clearance time of 72 hours. Substantial effort has been put into the authorities and legislation dimension, in part because it may be considered low-hanging fruit compared to the more material dimensions.

Responsibility for the *command and control (C2)* of military mobility primarily lies with each sovereign state. This includes oversight and decision-making regarding infrastructure construction, capability planning, and funding thereof, as well as arranging the successful entry, transit, and sustainment of allied troops. Under the Host Nation Support (HNS) concept, each country hosting allied troops at a given time coordinates transport, accommodation, and other capabilities. The NATO

Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) coordinates and synchronises the reinforcement of troops and equipment across Europe. Problems with C2 relate to information sharing, where states may not provide accurate and up-to-date information to NATO, and NATO may not coordinate sufficiently with the EU, owing to uneven membership structures and NATO classification systems.

Lessons learned and implications for military mobility in Europe

Although significant challenges remain, there has been notable progress within the field of military mobility in the Dutch–German–Polish region, with the MMA serving as an important framework for developing and coordinating efforts. In this context, the work is now moving into an implementation phase, in which the recommendations formulated by the three-nation group need to be put into practice.

The findings moreover have broader implications for efforts to improve military mobility across Europe as a whole. One of the foremost lessons learned is that rules and regulations need to be more systematically addressed, both within the three countries examined and across Europe as a whole. Harmonising regulatory frameworks is essential to ensure the smooth and rapid movement of troops and equipment. Another challenge relates, on the one hand, to the complexity of overlapping mandates and responsibilities among the many stakeholders of military mobility and, on the other hand, to the silo mentality among the actors. A further key lessons concern the need to ensure the resilience of critical infrastructure in Europe, much of which requires urgent maintenance and modernization. This is an essential part of national and collective defence planning, and should be integrated to a much greater extent into the planning and execution of military mobility.

The study finds that a bottom-up approach, such as the Dutch–German–Polish MMA initiative, can be particularly fruitful in advancing military mobility, especially with regard to regulatory and procedural harmonisation. However, when it comes to improving physical infrastructure and enhancing capabilities, a top-down perspective is often required. In this context, EU funding could play an increasingly important role in the future, serving as a key instrument to incentivise and facilitate the development of dual-use infrastructure suitable for both civilian and military purposes. Accelerating the development of critical infrastructure and strengthening logistical and transport capabilities are urgent priorities today, to ensure rapid movement of forces in a crisis. ■