

Military mobility

Infrastructure for the defence of Europe

SUMMARY

To 'unite and strengthen Europe' is one of the goals expressed by the newly elected President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Her predecessor, Jean-Claude Juncker, believed that only 'a strong and united Europe can protect our citizens against threats internal and external.' European infrastructure that enables connectivity and ensures a rapid response in case of a crisis is a prerequisite for these visions. Since 2017, awareness has been increasing about the obstacles preventing armed forces from moving effectively and swiftly across borders in crisis conditions. The measures taken to correct this strategic vulnerability are known under the term *military mobility*.

Existing regulatory, administrative, and infrastructure inconsistencies and impediments across the territory of the European Union (EU) significantly hamper military exercises and training. Military mobility aims to harmonise rules across EU Member States and to explore the potential of a civilian-military approach to infrastructure development. Through measures such as funding dual-use transport infrastructure, and simplifying diplomatic clearances and customs rules, the European Commission aims to improve military mobility across as well as beyond the EU, in support of missions and operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy. The unique EU contribution is its ability to leverage existing policies in the civilian realm to create added value for the military.

This goal can be achieved only if a whole-of-government approach is applied, which in turn requires close collaboration between different bodies at the EU level, between them and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and between them and various actors at the Member State level. So far, military mobility has enjoyed a high degree of commitment from all stakeholders, which has in turn ensured swift policy implementation. It is becoming increasingly clear that military mobility is an essential piece in the EU's ambition to become a stronger global actor.



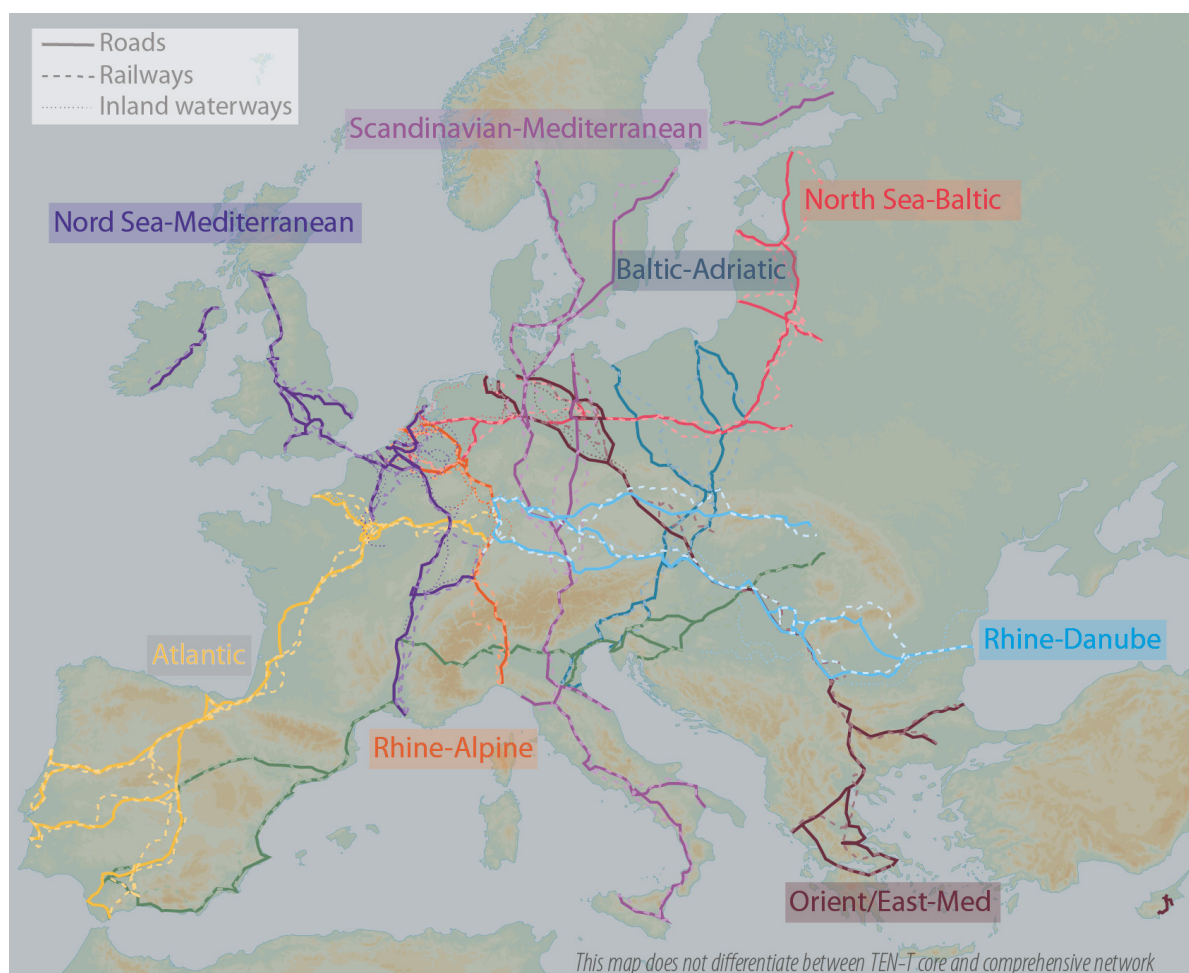
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Mobility for the military?

Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, one of Napoleon Bonaparte's most renowned generals, notably made the connection between [strategy and logistics](#) as being co-dependent: the former decides where and how to act while the latter ensures the practical ability to do so. Contemporary authors have defined military mobility, or logistics, as the decisions regarding 'what [military force](#) can be delivered to an operational theatre, the time it will take to deliver that force, the scale of forces that can be supported,' and the elements necessary for allowing the movement of military equipment and personnel. The effective deployment, training, and supplying of armed forces depend on appropriate situational awareness and solid networks that enable both civil and military [mobility](#). This means that national infrastructure across European countries must be able to support such activities. The synergies between defence needs and transport infrastructure development are becoming increasingly obvious at both the EU and NATO levels. In a political environment where, on the one hand, the European Union is consolidating defence ambitions in order to take more responsibility for its own security and, on the other hand, resources must be spent in a smarter way, military mobility has emerged as a key topic on the European agenda.

Figure 1 – The Trans-European Transport Network corridors



Source: EPRS with data from the European Commission, 2020.

Military infrastructure in Europe

A key element underpinning the expansion of the Roman Empire was the intricate civil and military transport logistics, facilitated by their '[superb infrastructure](#).' Logistics were also a fundamental component of military thought in Western Europe during the Cold War. In this period, [NATO forces](#)

spread across Allied territory and strong transport capabilities were provided across supply routes. Infrastructure development was also planned accordingly.

In 1986, NATO developed a [Logistics handbook](#) outlining in detail the technicalities of military mobility. The fact that the handbook has no longer been updated and revised since 1997 is telling in itself. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, military logistics and readiness for military mobility have been neglected, mostly as a result of the change in Europe's security environment. Some academics argue that the [importance](#) of military logistics has been overlooked in the defence and strategic transport debates since the end of the Cold War. Others defend the view that the [evolution](#) from the territorial defensive focus of European armed forces to an expeditionary one, configured for peacekeeping missions abroad, bore the greatest impact to the degradation of military mobility in Europe. A further complicating factor are the differences in infrastructure between the original NATO Allies and those from the former Warsaw Pact.

Can today's level of military mobility pass the test?

Since the 1990s, European infrastructure has been developed purely for civilian purposes, with military aspects having seemingly disappeared from the planning and political priorities. Ensuring that military assets can move swiftly across borders in case of a crisis depends not only on suitable infrastructure but also on harmonised and flexible administrative procedures, customs checks, and logistics hubs. Since 2018, substantial efforts have been made to improve each of these aspects.

Infrastructure

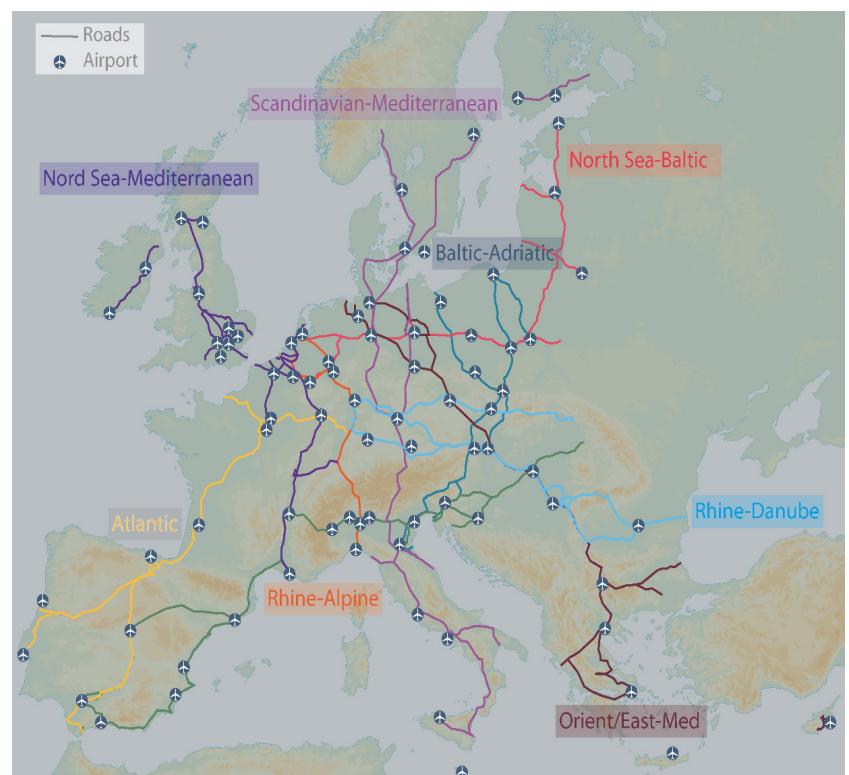
The networks underpinning the EU's transport infrastructure are gathered under the [trans-European transport network](#) (TEN-T). The TEN-T is an EU policy aiming to support the EU's internal market by creating a single European transport area. This involves closing gaps and removing technical and regulatory obstacles between the transport networks of EU Member States. The objective of the TEN-T is to invest coherently in and develop networks of roads, railways, ports, and airports, and to ensure that they are interconnected.

The [TEN-T](#) consists of two networks:

- a **comprehensive network** - consisting of all existing and planned (i.e. to be completed by 2050) transport infrastructure.
- a **core network** – a subset of the most strategically important elements of the comprehensive network, organised in [nine corridors](#) and to be completed by 2030.

Transport infrastructure investments under TEN-T are conducted through the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) – an instrument created during the consolidation of the TEN-T policy in 2013. Financing the deployment of the TEN-T is coordinated across both core and comprehensive networks.

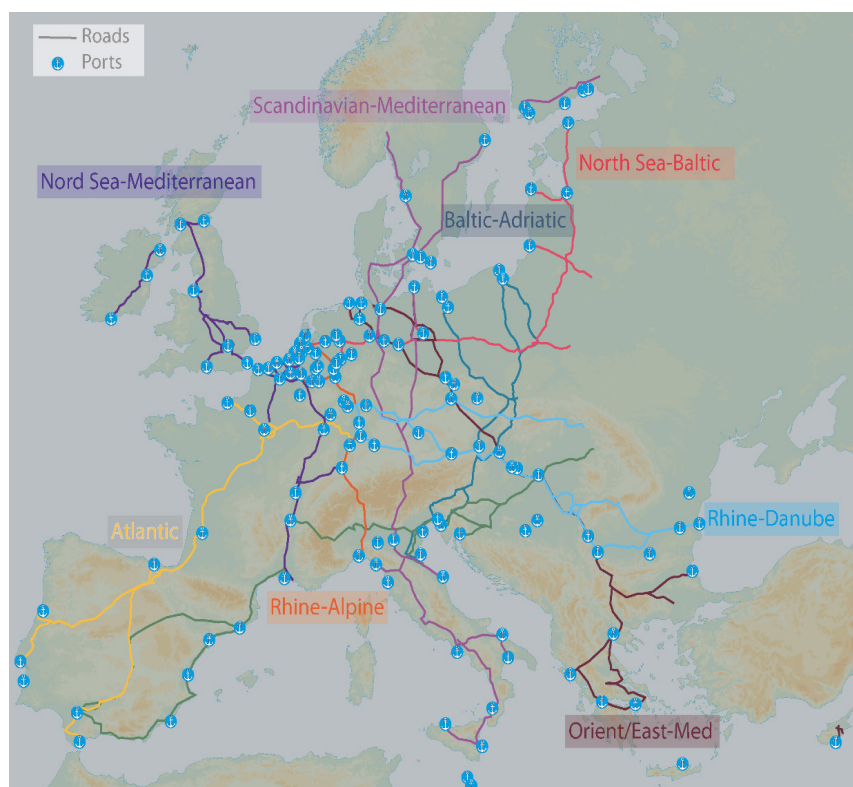
Figure 2 – The TEN-T airports



Source: EPRS with data from the European Commission, 2020.

The nine core network corridors forming the backbone of the TEN-T can be seen in Figure 1. In the context of military mobility, the TEN-T is the main tool for identifying dual-use synergies in the transport networks. These synergies were outlined in a document entitled Gap Analysis, referred to in the joint implementation [report](#) discussed below. It compared the TEN-T infrastructure and its requirements with those of the military sector, finding an overlap of 94 %. Possible solutions were identified to fill the gaps and missing links. This analysis laid the groundwork for defining dual-use requirements. When unsuitable for the weight of military equipment, infrastructure such as roads, bridges, railways, but also air and sea ports, becomes an obstacle to military mobility. Maps such as those illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 are key tools in planning military mobility, while also helping identify where funding could be concentrated to serve both civilian infrastructure development as well as military requirements.

Figure 3 – The TEN-T maritime ports



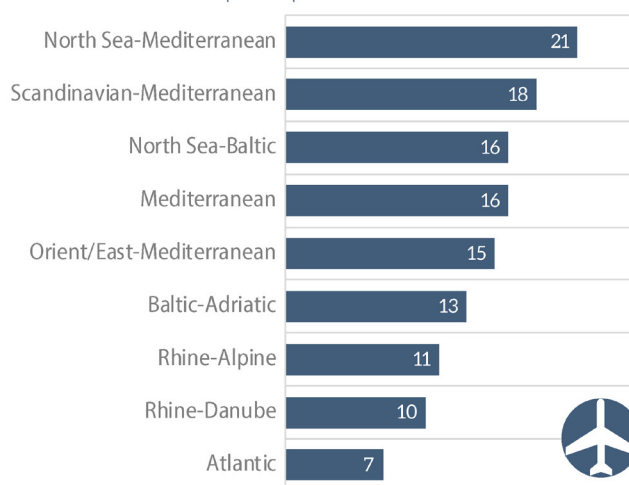
Source: EPRS with data from the European Commission, 2020.

Figure 4 – The TEN-T maritime and air ports

Total airports 411

Core	Comprehensive
94	317

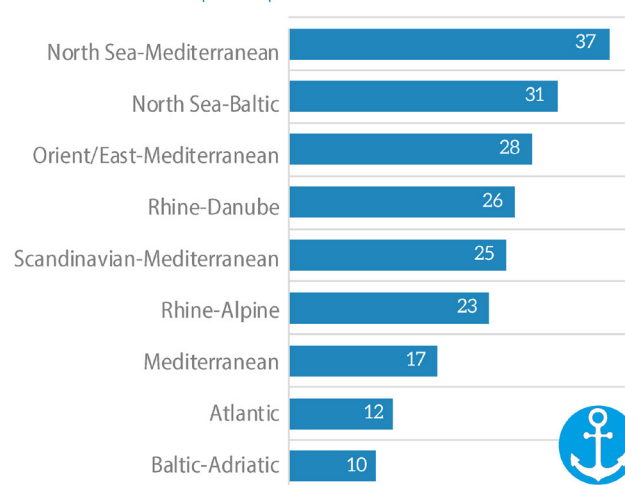
Number of core airports per corridor



Total ports 571

Core	Comprehensive
163	408

Number of core ports per corridor



Source: EPRS with data from the European Commission, 2020.

Comprehensive infrastructure planning must also account for viable and swift transit where geographical characteristics, such as high [mountain ranges](#), could become an impediment. One of the largest military mobility [exercises](#) in recent years took place in October 2018 and involved troop movements to and through Scandinavia. Specialists have nonetheless argued that faster [mobility](#) is needed. Further testing of strategic reinforcement took place in the [Defender 2020](#) military exercise, which entailed moving troops from the United States to different parts of Europe.

Regulatory and procedural practices

Administrative, regulatory, and procedural practices concerning the transport of military goods, equipment, and troops vary greatly across EU Member States. This is why there is potential for European added value in this area, with a concrete contribution to the defence ambitions of EU countries. The transport of dangerous [goods](#) has been identified as an area where more harmonisation across the EU could increase efficiency. Currently, national rules apply, leading to delays and confusion about the different applicable procedures.

Another requirement which the action plan on military mobility aims to simplify and harmonise has to do with customs and value-added tax (VAT) on cross-border military movements. Across the EU, Member States use either national forms or, for members of NATO, the [NATO Form 302](#). The European Defence Agency (EDA) has developed a template for an EU Form 302, in alignment with the NATO form, with the end-goal of using identical forms to facilitate uniform transit. This administrative change implies amendments to the [EU's Customs Code](#). Additionally, given that armed forces taking part in defence exercises and training under NATO already benefit from VAT exemptions for their supplies, the Commission aims to ensure the same treatment for defence efforts undertaken under the EU's umbrella. At the time of writing, the proposal awaited approval from the Council of the EU.

Lastly, the simplification of cross-border movement permissions and diplomatic clearance procedures is paramount for faster and more efficient military mobility. The EDA is leading progress on these particular aspects through several projects, including:

- [Optimising cross-border movement permission procedures in the EU](#) – aims to help harmonise national regulations in order to reduce the administrative burden for surface and air cross-border movement permissions.
- [EU multimodal transport hub](#) – aims to simplify cross-border administrative procedures and better coordinate troop movements across Europe and abroad for the EU's missions and operations under the CSDP.
- [Diplomatic clearances technical arrangement](#) – aims to harmonise procedures for granting diplomatic clearances for military air transport.

Military mobility at the EU strategic level

At the EU level, military mobility is considered an essential building block for the establishment of a European Defence Union – an aspiration invoked by the leadership of the EU on several occasions. For example, in his [State of the Union address](#) in September 2017, then Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called for a fully fledged European Defence Union by 2025.

At the strategic level, it is generally considered that the 2016 [EU Global Strategy](#) (EUGS) marked a new milestone in the debate about the EU's role in the world and about completing the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). [Military mobility](#) is often referred to as part of the defence package following the EUGS, which includes the launch of the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) mechanism, the establishment of the European Defence Fund and the creation of a coordinated annual review on defence. These measures comprise the EU's response to an increasingly unpredictable environment, and speak of the political momentum to advance towards more strategic autonomy. In broad terms, logistics – including military mobility – represent the basis for implementing the goals set out in the EUGS.

The EU's approach to addressing the obstacles to military mobility discussed above is characterised by a blend of civilian and military instruments and the identification of synergies. The goal of the EU is, on the one hand, to achieve seamless military mobility on European territory with a view to facilitating training and ensuring crisis preparedness and, on the other hand, to improve deployment in the context of CSDP missions and operations abroad. The aim is to leverage existing EU policies in the civilian realm to facilitate military mobility.

EU deliverables on military mobility

EU action in this direction began on 10 November 2017 with the European Commission and High Representative's [joint communication](#) on improving military mobility. The communication mapped current barriers to military mobility and outlined possible solutions. On 28 March 2018, the Commission and High Representative presented the [action plan](#) on military mobility, which was subsequently welcomed by the Council in June 2018. The action plan focuses on the EU's role in facilitating military mobility, especially by exploring civilian-military synergies. As outlined above, three main areas of action have been identified: infrastructure, regulatory and procedural – including the transport of dangerous goods, customs and value added tax, and cross-border movement permissions. The action plan also addresses cross-cutting issues, such as hybrid threats. On 3 June 2019, the Commission and High Representative published a [joint report](#) on the implementation of military mobility, outlining the progress achieved thus far.

EU funding possibilities

The European Commission's proposed financial [allocation](#) for military mobility under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) as part of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF) is €6.5 billion. This envelope is envisioned to finance strictly civilian-military dual-use projects. In laying down the objectives, rules, and funding for the CEF, the Council acknowledges the [aim](#) of adapting parts of the TEN-T for 'improving both civilian and military mobility.' The regulation also lists military mobility and the number of transport infrastructure components adapted to civilian-military dual-use requirements as key indicators for evaluating the implementation of the regulation. In its proposal, the Commission also transferred €11.3 billion from the Cohesion Fund allocation into the CEF for 'transport projects offering high European added value.' Adding the €12.8 billion proposed for the CEF general envelope, the total proposed CEF allocation amounts to €30.6 billion.

Following a [request](#) from the European Council, the Finnish Presidency of the Council submitted on 5 December 2019 a '[negotiating box](#)' on its proposal for the MFF budgetary allocations, foreseeing an envelope for military mobility of €2.5 billion, less than half the amount suggested by the Commission. A new version of the [negotiating box](#) presented by European Council President, Charles Michel, for discussion at a European Council meeting on 20 February 2020 further reduces the amount to €1.5 billion. However, given that the negotiations for the 2021-2027 MFF are still ongoing at the time of publishing, the principle of 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed' applies. CEF [funding](#) for military mobility would be available for up to 50 % co-funding for eligible projects, while [cohesion Member States](#) could reach up to 85 % co-funding by transferring funds from the cohesion envelope. The funding is available for projects of all transport modes, covering both the upgrade of existing infrastructure and the construction of new dual-use components. The funding covers both core and comprehensive networks of the TEN-T. The selection process remains unchanged. However, only projects addressing the overlaps between the military networks and the TEN-T identified in the above-mentioned Gap Analysis will be eligible for co-funding.

Permanent structured cooperation

Permanent structured cooperation – or [PESCO](#) – is a Treaty-based provision enabling EU Member States to work together to deepen their defence cooperation. This provision was activated in December 2017 and currently brings together 25 EU countries cooperating on 47 joint projects whose aim is to fill defence capability shortfalls and deepen military integration.

One such project is military mobility. Included in the second batch of [projects](#) adopted in March 2018, this project is also the largest, involving 24 of the 25 PESCO participating Members. Under Dutch leadership, the project focuses on the simplification and standardisation of cross-border military transport, which is to be achieved in coordination with other efforts on military mobility, such as the action plan, cooperation between the EU and NATO, and the work of the EDA. This project is also related to another PESCO project: the [Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations](#).

Military mobility also features as one of the 20 [binding commitments](#) that participating Member States have signed up to under PESCO. The text reads:

'With regard to availability and deployability of the forces, the participating Member States are committed to simplifying and standardising cross border military transport in Europe for enabling rapid deployment of military materiel and personnel.'

It has been argued that the political and intergovernmental [nature](#) of the PESCO framework is an asset for military mobility, for it allows Member States to apply pressure more easily.

EU-NATO cooperation

While military mobility has resurfaced as a key issue for NATO since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, NATO by itself lacks the necessary instruments to improve military mobility in Europe. Given the EU's legislative and financial toolbox as well as its transport expertise, it is an [indispensable player](#) for improving military mobility. This topic has emerged as a key priority area for the implementation of the 2018 EU-NATO [joint declaration](#), which calls for 'swift and demonstrable progress' in military mobility. The EU's work on this topic, including in the PESCO format, is to be coordinated with the logistical [cluster](#) of the NATO [Framework Nations Concept](#).

The Commission and High Representative's [joint report](#) on the implementation of military mobility outlines concrete examples of EU-NATO synergy, such as the agreement over 'military requirements' – key principles and aspects conditioning military movements, from geographical indicators and transport resources to regulatory and environmental considerations. As approved by the EU Military Committee – the highest military body of the Council of the EU – and the Council, the requirements reflect the parameters and indicators provided by NATO. The requirements allowed the EU to evaluate the existing gaps between civilian and military transport infrastructure and networks. A 'structured dialogue on military [mobility](#)' between the EU and NATO was launched in 2018, gathering key decision-makers from both organisations several times a year. The dialogue aims to 'ensure coherence and mutual reinforcement of efforts' as well as to avoid duplication. Other coordination mechanisms include informal exchanges of views at staff-to-staff level.

Military mobility is often described as the poster child of EU-NATO cooperation, as it best portrays the added value of their combined instruments. The Council of the EU has underlined the [importance](#) of military mobility as a good example for strengthening this cooperation. [Experts](#) argue that work in this area could improve the overall information exchange between the EU and NATO, as well as set a high standard for cooperation. Nonetheless, some challenges still remain, particularly with regard to different document classification practices, non-equivalent security clearances, and

Military mobility and strategic autonomy

The need to enhance strategic autonomy had been expressed at EU level as early as [2013](#), with the European Parliament calling for it repeatedly since [2009](#) and most recently in [January 2020](#). If strategic autonomy is understood as the ability to take decisions and act upon them autonomously, then the ability to swiftly react to crises to Europe's security is key to this aim. Military mobility is an indispensable enabler of this goal. The Commission's [progress report](#) on military mobility also endorses it as 'supporting the EU strategic autonomy ... to meet the relevant parts of the EU Level of Ambition.' The European Parliament acknowledges that military [mobility](#) is 'in line with the EU's aspirations for strategic autonomy.'

A [study](#) that surveyed stakeholders in EU Member States found that military mobility is considered an essential capability for achieving strategic autonomy. Lastly, military mobility is also a key common [transatlantic interest](#).

the lack of strong, working-level cooperation mechanisms. Overall, military mobility has the potential to provide a positive precedent for EU-NATO cooperation and incentivise even more synergies and collaboration.

European Parliament position

Over recent years, the EP has demonstrated consistent support for military mobility. It was quick to welcome the Commission's first [communication](#) on improving military mobility in 2017. In spring 2018, it called for the [Commission](#) to make use of the CEF for developing dual use civilian-military infrastructure. In June 2018, it reiterated [support](#) for infrastructure upgrades to facilitate military mobility. In its annual resolutions on the [CSDP](#) and on the [common foreign and security policy](#) in 2018, the EP welcomed the progress made, considering military mobility 'a central strategic tool in the current threat environment.'

In a [resolution](#) of December 2018 that focused particularly on military mobility, the EP reinforced its view that military mobility is a strategic and operational means to advance the EU's strategic autonomy. The resolution emphasises the potential for improving connectivity among EU countries as well as the importance of Member States' sovereignty when it comes to adjustments to legal, administrative, and infrastructure aspects. In line with Parliament's strong support of EU-NATO cooperation, this resolution urges the EU and NATO to 'intensify their cooperation and coordination' and to ensure the transparency of EU defence initiatives. However, Parliament expressed its regret about the 'limited strategic vision' of the EU's defence goals. In the first plenary session of the 2020s, the EP underlined the [importance](#) of military mobility for the 'collective security and defence of the EU Member States,' describing it as a strategic instrument complementary to NATO.

Who does what?

The complex nature of military mobility leads to an equally complex stakeholder landscape. Coordinating all aspects of military mobility requires a whole-of-government approach, entailing coordination among various actors, some of whom have not needed to collaborate before. They include actors from the various EU institutions, NATO, and the Member States, especially from ministries dealing with transport, defence, finance, taxation, and interior issues (see mapping).

On the EU side, the Commission is leading the implementation of the action plan on military mobility, with several bodies involved, such as:

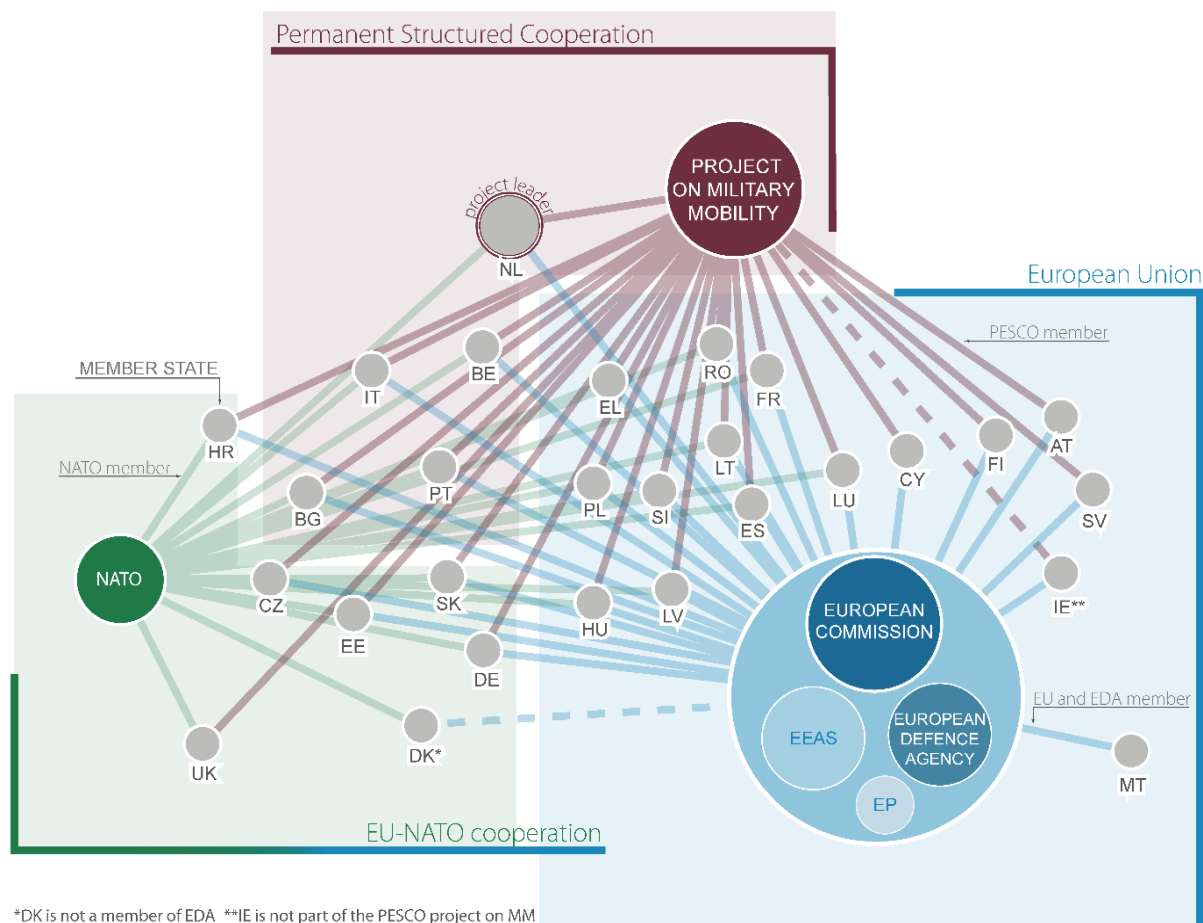
- the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, involved in transport infrastructure, particularly in identifying dual-use aspects, and in coordination;
- the Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union, involved in customs and VAT issues;
- the European External Action Service, fulfilling a coordinating role and ensuring coherence with the other EU defence initiatives;
- the European Union Military Staff, particularly involved in setting the military requirements and in coordinating with NATO;
- the European Defence Agency, involved predominantly in harmonising cross-border permissions and in customs-related matters.

On the NATO side, logistical aspects have been further streamlined with the changes in the NATO command structure and the creation of two new headquarters one in the German city of Ulm and another in Norfolk, in the United States. Together they form the [Joint Support and Enabling Command](#) and have the aim of accelerating and better coordinating the movement of NATO forces. The command in Ulm in particular is responsible for logistics and support.

In EU Member States, military mobility requires varying degrees of input from ministries, ranging from transportation and defence, to economy, taxation, justice, and health. Such a cross-ministerial approach is required, for example, to cope with medical emergencies, tax supplies intended for the armed forces, and establish jurisdiction in case of criminal acts.

Figure 5 – Military mobility key stakeholder mapping

MILITARY MOBILITY STAKEHOLDERS



Source: EPRS, 2020.

In addition, a 'Friends of Military Mobility' informal group has been created in order to ensure coordination with other stakeholders. The group includes Germany, Estonia, France, the Netherlands and Finland, as well as Norway, the UK and the US.

Other bodies that contribute to the overall goal of facilitating military mobility are:

- [European Air Transport Command](#) – created in 2010 and currently encompassing seven EU Member States, aims to improve the effectiveness of military air transport;
- [Movement Coordination Centre Europe](#) – created in 2007, it brings together 28 states and coordinates their sealift, air transport, inland transport, and air-to-air refuelling capabilities in military exercises and deployments abroad;
- [Athens Multinational Sealift Coordination Centre](#) – created in 2004 to support logistics operational planning, sealift, and multi-modal transport interconnections.

Next steps

It is generally agreed that work on military mobility has progressed at a fast and steady pace on the side of the EU. In its June 2019 [conclusions](#), the Council of the EU welcomed the ongoing implementation efforts and the tangible results at the EU, EU-NATO, and Member State levels. It also called for advancing the PESCO project related to military mobility, and reiterated Member States' commitment to identifying: a) dual-use elements that will require an upgrading of the existing infrastructure, and b) the need for creating new elements by the end of 2020.

The European Commission is expected to present its next progress [report](#) on military mobility by the end of summer 2020. The final amount of the CEF envelope for military mobility depends on the eventual interinstitutional agreement on the next MFF. While there is no definitive deadline for military mobility – a continuous work-in-progress by its nature – the general guideline is that the EU should have substantially improved it by 2025, in accordance with former European Commission President Juncker's [ambition](#) that 'by 2025 we need a fully fledged European Defence Union.'

Commission President von der Leyen, in her [opening statement](#) before her election by the European Parliament in July 2019, endorsed the concept of a European Defence Union. She has divided the responsibility for the military mobility portfolio between the Transport Commissioner [Adina-loana Vălean](#), [tasked](#) with implementing dual-use infrastructure projects via the CEF in order to improve military mobility, and the Commissioner for Internal Market, [Thierry Breton](#), tasked with leading the [implementation](#) of the action plan in close cooperation with the Commissioner for Transport.

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