

Military mobility: Ambition versus reality

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Abstract

This paper deals with military mobility, which in recent years has become one of the strategic priorities for both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). The authors argue that the ability to quickly transport soldiers and military equipment over long distances across member states' territories is a prerequisite for an effective and rapid military response by the allies. An analysis of the achievements to date shows that the European Union is one of the key actors in identifying and eliminating existing barriers and initiating necessary infrastructure construction. Simultaneously, close cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in this area allows the parties involved to achieve synergies. This paper analyzes the results achieved in the light of the assumed objectives. Simultaneously, elements that hinder military mobility and perspectives of the development of the studied issue are indicated.

Keywords: defense, deterrence, European Union, military mobility, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, security

1. Introduction

For centuries, alliances have been the basis of foreign and security policy for many states, especially those with insufficient potential to ensure their own security. Since 1949, the 'security umbrella' and synonym of alliance credibility has been the North Atlantic Treaty. Nowadays, as R. Gottemoeller notes, NATO faces many challenges and threats – "It must contend with a resurgent Russia, a rising China, continuing terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and the imperative to keep up with advances in military technology" (Gottmoeller, 2019). The situation in Ukraine in 2014 made it strikingly clear that the threat from the Russian Federation is ever-present. Moreover, given the revolutionary changes in the security environment, some European states' persistent indifferent attitude may lead to a crisis of faith in solidarity within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and, in the long run, to question its continued existence.

Clearly, NATO requires profound changes in policymakers' thinking and states' approach to acquiring capabilities and capacities adequate to the current security environment's requirements. The black swan that the world has been grappling with recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, sheds new additional light on states' and international organizations' needs in the process of ensuring security in the broadest sense. As notes T. Usewicz (2021) NATO's ability to adapt to dynamically changing security environments is key to its survival and longevity.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the primary function of NATO is collective defense, and it is this what constitutes the foundation of cooperation among its member states.

In accordance with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the allied states are obliged to provide mutual assistance if one of them falls victim to external armed aggression. Although in the cited clause of collective self-defense, the use of armed forces is not obligatory; nevertheless, the states primarily count on military assistance.

The effectiveness of deterrence and collective defense, which form the core of NATO's mission to strengthen its allies' security, is closely correlated with the ability to respond rapidly to emerging threats and the rapid movement of forces and military equipment to the region of a potential crisis. This proves to be a considerable challenge in European conditions, especially considering the ambitious readiness deadlines assumed for the rapid response forces.

This problem has been recognized on a broader scale relatively recently, namely in June 2017, when the Dutch Minister of Defense J. Hennis-Plasschaert wrote to NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg and EU High Representative F. Mogherini that "obstacles to cross-border military transport in Europe must disappear" (Schultz, 2017). The European Union's involvement in the issue of military mobility was a natural consequence of the intensification of efforts at the security and defense level as a result of the adoption in 2016 of *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. There were many signals in the document announcing the strengthening of cooperation between NATO and the EU on various levels. Among them was the announcement that "the EU will deepen its partnership with NATO through coordinated defense capability development, parallel and synchronized exercises, and mutually reinforcing actions to build the capabilities of our partners, counter hybrid and cyber threats, and promote maritime security" (European Union Global Strategy, 2016, p.37).

2. Methodological assumptions

The initiated work has been going on for several years now, long enough to summarize the achievements so far and verify them with the assumed goals.

The aim of this article and the conducted research is to analyze the progress of work in this area in terms of the assumptions included in the conceptual documents. The authors prove that the issue of military mobility is crucial from both NATO and EU perspectives.

The balance of achievements to date, on the other hand, makes it possible to assess the degree of implementation of this initiative and, in a further step, to identify difficulties and problems that may arise in the further course of work. In their considerations, the authors also took into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of the studied issue. The article ends with a summary and an indication of the catalog of activities that should be considered in the following stages of work on military mobility.

The research process was carried out methodically, defined by the research problems that were generated at the initial stage of the research in the form of the following questions:

1. What is the importance of the issue of military mobility for improving the security of NATO and EU countries?
2. What is the effectiveness of the efforts to date? What results have been achieved?
3. What are the prospects for the development of the issue under study? What challenges and threats should be considered in the further course of work?
4. What actions should be taken to increase the chances for the effective implementation of military mobility initiative?

The authors of this article assume that military mobility is of key importance for the security of the member states, both NATO and the EU. However, the problem was noticed relatively late, particularly in the face of the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation and the growing uncertainty in the European security environment. The effectiveness of action in this area largely depends on the political consensus among decision-makers, and above all, the determination of the EU institutions and states in the uninterrupted financing of the assumed plans implementation.

Solving the identified research problems required the use of various methods. In the research progress, primarily the desk research was used based on normative and conceptual documents adopted by various institutions and entities, especially at the EU level, as well as reports and expert studies. It is worth noting that military mobility has appeared in the public discourse only for a few years, so the literature on the issue under study consists mainly of reports and expert analysis developed by various research centers and think tanks. Supporting (empirical) methods were also used, such as, talks and expert consultations conducted during the authors' participation in conceptual developments on military mobility. An important element of their research was the participant observation conducted by the authors during conferences and expert discussions organized by the Northern Group format, PESCO Working Groups or EDA led working level CBMP.

Consultations, exchange of views and experiences with experts from other countries proved to be extremely valuable in the course of work on this article.



3. The importance of military mobility for the security of NATO and EU countries

As already mentioned in the introduction, military mobility is crucial in the context of the security of NATO and EU countries. In the face of the Russian Federation's neoimperial policy, improving military mobility is identified as one of the priorities that need to be engaged and improved. NATO forces must be able to move quickly, whether in the maritime, land, or air environment. Only a swift and decisive response on the part of the allies, both in terms of pre-emptive demonstration of force and counter-aggression, can stop Russia's imperial ambitions. Solidarity and a similar perception in assessing Russia's actions among the 30 states are undoubtedly significant challenges and require constant efforts at the political level. Nevertheless, while the possibility of triggering Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is determined by the achievement of political consensus, which, depending on political fluctuations, may be more or less difficult, the effectiveness of the response at the military level can be estimated and prepared in advance. The capabilities of NATO and EU states, especially the Alliance's eastern flank, are insufficient to respond on their own to possible aggressive actions posed by Russia. Furthermore, "Most analysts conclude that local Baltic forces and their eFP components would be unable to hold off a short-notice Russian attack" (Hodges et al., 2020. p.1). Thus, the condition for the effective defense of these states is allied support forces, and their response time will be a key factor. As a result, "NATO forces must be able to move as fast or faster than Russian forces in order to send a powerful message of unity, resolve, deterrence and to give civilian leaders credible options" (Hodges et al., 2020. p.1).

At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, *The Readiness Action Plan* (RAP) was launched which is described as the most extensive strengthening of the Alliance since the Cold War. The Plan adopted a number of solutions to lead the Alliance to adapt to a rapidly changing and extremely challenging security environment. These solutions include assurance measures, which "comprise a series of land, sea and air activities in, on and around the eastern part of Alliance territory, which are reinforced by exercises focused on collective defense and crisis management" (NATO, 2020). This document also contains several adaptation measures, which in turn concern changes in the command and force structure of the Alliance, including the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Subsequent NATO summits have brought new findings and new initiatives to strengthen its deterrence and defense capabilities, including the "Four 30s" project, which 'assumes that by 2022 NATO will have 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 warships at its disposal, ready to be deployed in 30 days or less (...). Hosting these forces poses significant logistic challenges and demands for creating a necessary infrastructure" (Smura, 2018). Also, the Enablement Plan for SACEUR's Area of Responsibility (AoR) was adopted. This document contains a number of elements aimed at improving and strengthening several important areas of NATO operations, namely:

- logistical capabilities by adjusting legislation and procedures to facilitate border crossing,
- enhancing command and control over logistics,
- increasing transport capabilities and upgrading infrastructure that is able to cope with large quantities of heavy military transport in Europe (based on Drent et al. (2019)).

The success of applying these adopted solutions, especially the engagement of VJTF capable of deploying in a very short notice, is tightly bound to the military mobility initiative.

Military mobility determines de facto the efficiency of most NATO military initiatives; thus, an inability to move and deploy rapidly in all domains throughout the theatre will clearly signal a lack of credibility and effectiveness of allied support. An eminently unfavorable scenario in NATO's optics is to build the belief in its environment that it cannot respond successfully. Two factors are crucial in this case. First, member states must develop their capabilities while ensuring that they ultimately form a complementary whole, and second, the environment must be adequately informed.

Proper strategic communication and other cognitive space activities should be as important as the acquisition of military capabilities.

In the context of the importance of military mobility for the security of NATO and EU states, it is also worth mentioning that, in addition to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, a mutual assistance obligation, i.e., a mutual defense clause (Article 42(7) of *the Treaty on European Union* (TEU)), has also been included in European Union treaty law. For example, the clause provides that "if any EU country becomes the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other EU countries have an obligation towards it to provide aid and assistance by all means at their disposal, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations" (EUR-Lex, n.d.). This is of particular importance in the security policy of states that are EU members but not NATO members (e.g., Sweden and Finland). As in the case of allied reinforcement forces, the possibility of providing military support depends on the state's ability to receive it and the capability to move forces and resources over long distances. Besides, the European Union's responsibilities in the development of integration processes, namely crisis management and the commitment to stabilize the situation in its immediate vicinity, also imply the need to develop military capabilities.

Hence, the military mobility initiative is a shared strategic interest for both NATO and the EU and, according to many experts, could be a flagship example of good cooperation. For instance, the EU "has more to say on legal and regulatory issues and has available funds and programs on cross-border mobility. NATO can plan and calculate the military's needs for transport across Europe to ensure credible deterrence" (Drent et al., 2019, p.1).

Military mobility can become the beginning of a strategic rapprochement between NATO and the EU. The correlation between defense planning and the acquisition of military capabilities within the EU can result in synergies and, in the long term, enable a model of harmonious cooperation between the organizations.

Furthermore, “if the model of launching PESCO projects in close cooperation with NATO is consolidated, fears of duplication or even undermining of the Alliance’s initiatives by the EU may prove unfounded” (Terlikowski, 2018). Continued cooperation and a clear division of responsibilities are in the interest of both NATO and the EU. It is a prerequisite for strengthening NATO and the CSDP and “a strong CSDP would symbolize a Union that is really serious about defense” (Terlikowski, 2013, p.28).

The effects of the actions taken may certainly be measured during large-scale military exercises, such as, e.g., DEFENDER EUROPE 2020. Despite many disturbances caused by COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly hampered the conduct of the exercise and speed of troops deployment, massive improvements in information exchange and movement coordination between participating nations resulting from implemented military mobility solutions were observed.

The following part of the paper will analyze the implementation of the assumed goals in military mobility.

4. EU objectives in the area of military mobility

The European Union is currently the *spiritus movens* of activities in the area of military mobility. As a legal community, it has the necessary forces and means, and cooperation with NATO is an excellent complement in areas that may seem to be terra incognita from the EU integration process’s perspective. Security and defense fall within the domain of intergovernmental cooperation, and the EU institutions’ competences are limited in this respect. In recent years, however, some impulses towards cautious emancipation of these areas can be observed.

As mentioned above, in 2016, *A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy* was adopted, and then at the EU Council level, the level of the EU’s ambition in the area of defense preparations was defined. The following year brought an increase in the dynamics of activities in this area. First of all, permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) was initiated, and thus “a political decision was taken to launch the last of the discussed initiatives of enhancing the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)” (Gotkowska, 2017).

Under this initiative, a list of 17 projects was agreed upon at the end of 2017, with more being added over time. Currently, according to the PESCO website, there are 47 ongoing projects in areas such as:

- training, facilities,
- maritime,
- cyber, C4ISR,
- air, systems,
- land, formations, systems,
- space,
- enabling, joint (PESCO, n.d.a).

It is worth noting that PESCO is not the only initiative developed after 2016 under the Common Security and Defense Policy. According to many observers, recent years have even brought a renaissance to this policy. As J. Gotkowska notes, this was possible mainly due to three factors, namely “the decision on Britain’s exit from the EU, the adoption of the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, and the dislike of some EU countries for Donald Trump and the conviction of the need to reduce dependence on the US” (Gotkowska, 2017).

As part of the implementation of the enabling, joint area, the Military Mobility project was initiated, which ‘supports Member States “commitment to simplify and standardize cross-border military transport procedures in line with the Council conclusions of June 25, 2018. It aims to enable the unhindered movement of military personnel and assets within the borders of the EU. This entails avoiding long bureaucratic procedures to move through or over the EU Member States, be it via rail, road, air or sea” (PESCO, n.d.b).

As noted earlier, work in this area has been ongoing since 2017. At that time, “The Military Mobility initiative was launched (...) and further elaborated in the EU Action Plan on Military Mobility (hereafter Action Plan) of March 28, 2018. It addresses three main areas – transport infrastructure, regulatory and procedural issues, and other cross-cutting topics by fostering civilian-military synergies and leveraging existing policies and instruments” (European Commission, 2010. p.1). The EU Action Plan on Military Mobility is based on the assumptions developed by experts within the EDA. The Action Plan “identifies tasks, responsibilities, and timelines for improving Military Mobility with regard to legal aspects, customs, military requirements, and cross-border movement permissions” (European Defence Agency, 2019).

The main objectives that were identified in the Action Plan work include:

- military requirements,
- transport infrastructure,
- dangerous goods,

- customs and Value-Added Tax,
- cross-Border Movement permission,
- other issues (based on EUR-Lex (2018)).

5. Military mobility - evaluation

In October 2020, the European Commission, together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, presented the second report on implementing the Action Plan on Military Mobility. As noted by Josep Borrell Fontelles, “Our second report on the Military Mobility Action Plan shows progress towards better transport infrastructure and quicker procedures thanks to Member States actions and EU support” (Railway Pro, 2020). According to the report’s authors, the critical progress correlates civilian aspects of transport infrastructure development to achieve military mobility capabilities. Fewer gaps in this area have been identified, and those that remain are smaller. Furthermore, “the total length and the number of nodes of the military transport network have increased. Some of these additions to the military transport network have helped to reduce the number of missing cross-border links” (Railway Pro, 2020).

The remaining military mobility achievements are reviewed below in light of this report.

Already at its beginning, the document notes that “The implementation of the Action Plan has continued progressing well owing to close and continuous cooperation between the Commission services, the European External Action Service including the EU Military Staff, and the European Defence Agency, as well as full involvement of the EU Member States in a whole-of-government approach while respecting their national sovereignty and decision-making” (European Commission, 2020. p.2). Part II of the report refers to military requirements for military mobility within and beyond the EU. Regarding the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the transport infrastructure parameters and geographical data on military requirements for military mobility within and beyond the EU were updated. Then, on July 15, 2019, the Council approved the updated Military Requirements as prepared by the EU Military Staff in close cooperation with the Commission services, the European Defence Agency, and the EU Member States. This was a significant step in the development of military mobility. This information is determined by taking effective action at the member state level to fill existing gaps and increase synergies between civilian and military use of already existing and emerging infrastructure. This is defined in the document as dual-use transport infrastructure.

On July 17, 2020, following the Military Requirements update and further to the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU on January 31, 2020, the Commission services and the EEAS submitted to the Council an updated gap analysis between the military requirements and the trans-European transport network requirements (European Commission, 2020, p.3-4). The update of the military requirements has reduced the existing gap between civil and military use of the infrastructure; moreover, the total length and the number of nodes of the military transport network have increased. It should be noted that although the overlap between the military transport network and the trans-European transport network has marginally decreased from 94% to 93%, it remains very high (European Commission, 2020. p.4). As noted in the document, the European Commission’s proposal to identify priority dual-use projects and present them in the first half of 2020 has met with great interest from the member states. The COVID-19 pandemic has somewhat slowed down the pace of work, but the response from the EU member states shows that the issue of military mobility is increasingly appreciated. An additional advantage of funds allocated for the purposes of transport infrastructure of dual-use is the possibility of stimulating the economies of countries whose investors will participate in implementing these projects.

In the context of building public awareness in the area of defense security, it should be clearly emphasized that the development of transport infrastructure is important from the point of view of both military and civilian needs. Hence, the goal is to develop infrastructure with dual-use in mind. The broad support and understanding among decision-makers in the Member States for such initiatives is essential. Examples of good integration of civil and military needs include two projects in Poland, i.e., the Deepwater Container Terminal in Świnoujście and the Solidarity Transport Hub Poland (STH). The terminal in Świnoujście, with direct access to the sea and convenient access to the Odra Waterway, an international railroad trunk line, and an efficient road connection, offers a chance to connect all available transport branches effectively (*Świnoujście – Singaporem pótnocy*, 2021).

In turn, STH is expected to be one of the largest hubs in Central and Eastern Europe. According to B. Hodges, “The Central Transportation Port would bring not only economic benefits to Poland, but also improve security in the region by facilitating a quick transfer of troops” (*Gen. Hodges: Poland’s transportation*, 2018). According to T. Smura, apart from substantial economic benefits, the project “will allow for receiving troops and equipment by air route, via military transport aircraft, including the C-5 Galaxy and C-17 Globemaster with a long take off roll (the CTP could ultimately boast four parallel runways thus significantly diminishing the threat of enemy airstrikes or ballistic missiles putting it out of operation) as well as by road and rail. Multimodal hub will enable to change the means of transportation (e.g., from road to railway) if necessary, enabling the fast movement of forces throughout the entire Eastern Flank – from Tallinn in Estonia to Constanta in Romania” (Smura, 2018). Importantly, in the implementation of these and similar projects, there is an opportunity to obtain funding for dual-use civilian-military infrastructure projects in the amount of €1.5 billion in the years 2021-2027 under the Multi-annual Financial Framework.

A significant achievement in the ongoing work on military mobility is the creation of TENtec, the European Commission's information system set up to coordinate and support the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy. This is a system that allows the modelling of transport and transport needs. It is based on member states' data and contains information on e.g., ports, airports, river navigation, railroads, and bridges. The system consists of two pillars. The first focuses on the collection, management, and storage of technical, geographic, and financial data for analysis, management, and policy decisions related to TEN-T and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) (European Commission, n.d.). The second pillar is related to the grant management activities of the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA). In 2018, in the TENtec system, the Commission services included data on the military aspects of transport networks. Later, they were updated in 2019 and early 2020 (UK exit from the EU).

TENtec ensures data transparency and the possibility of using the system's resources by many entities while facilitating the coordination of the implementation of transport projects to ultimately ensure the best possible development of the civilian and military transport network within the European Union.

Another area in which intensive work is underway is the transport of dangerous goods. The harmonization and unification of regulations in this area are particularly important from the military point of view. For example, "In 2019, the European Defense Agency presented the results of its survey addressing the existing rules and regulations applicable to the transport of dangerous goods in the military sector, which mapped national legislative frameworks with a focus on obstacles and restrictions to the movement of dangerous goods" (European Commission, 2020: 6). It is worth mentioning that the European Commission, together with the EDA, created a platform for exchanging knowledge between representatives of civilian stakeholders and military experts. Periodic meetings, joint arrangements or workshops are tools that support cooperation and build mutual trust. At this stage, the fundamental arrangement is to use civilian principles as a default approach and, if necessary, to supplement with the provisions of the NATO Standardization Agreement AMovP6. According to experts, this should enable the rapid and smooth international transport of dangerous goods for military purposes within the EU (European Commission, 2020. p.6).

Customs and value-added tax remain an important issue related to military mobility. The Action Plan includes a number of measures to simplify customs formalities for the transportation and movement of troops. Some of these have to be included in EU regulations. An example is the amendment brought to *Delegated Regulation (EU) 2015/2446*, which allows the use of the *EU Form 302*, in addition to the existing *NATO Form 302*, as a customs declaration for various cross-border movements. In parallel, the European Commission adopted an amendment to *the Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/2447*, which specifically includes procedural provisions for the use of the *EU and NATO 302 forms*. Another important initiative was the adoption of *the Council Directive (EU) 2019/2235* on December 16, 2019. According to the adopted arrangements, supplies to armed forces that are deployed outside the sending Member State and take part in Common Security and Defense Policy activities are exempted from value-added tax and excise duties. Similar mechanisms are already in place within NATO.

Parallel to the activities already presented, within the framework of EDA, work is being conducted on *Optimizing Cross-Border Movement Permission Procedures in Europe*. The aim is to develop two Technical Arrangements, one for surface and another for the air domain. According to experts, the program is developing very well. The first draft of both Technical Arrangements has already been developed. Harmonizing the approval and permission process for cross-border movement is essential for the smooth movement of personnel, armaments and military equipment.

The concluding section of the report, *Joint report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility from June 2019 to September 2020* brought attention to disinformation, cyber security, and critical infrastructure protection as elements necessary to be included in the course of the ongoing work.

In summary, the key achievements in the process of ensuring military mobility in the EU so far should be identified as:

- the update of the Military Requirements,
- the update of the gap analysis,
- the agreement of the dual-use requirements as well as the adoption of the EU Form 302,
- the Directive ensuring the equal treatment of defense efforts under NATO and under the EU framework from the fiscal perspective,
- placing data on the military transport network in the TENtec system,
- creating a platform for civil-military cooperation in the field of dangerous goods transport,
- increasing the awareness of decision-makers and citizens on the importance of military mobility for the security of the EU and NATO state,
- strengthening cooperation between NATO and the EU,
- increasing coordination between member states and agencies and other actors within NATO and the EU.

6. Summary

So far, NATO and EU countries' efforts to improve mobility should be assessed positively, especially since the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has not significantly slowed down the pace of work. The effectiveness of further actions depends on many factors, but the most important of them is the permanent development of cooperation in the identified areas and permanent and stable funding. It is worth emphasizing that the European Council decided to allocate EUR 1.5 billion (currently EUR 1.69 billion) for this purpose within the Connecting Europe Facility 2021-2027. It is quite a significant adjustment of the budget in relation to the original requirements and as R. Sikorski states: "Funding for military mobility across the EU, considered as crucial, faces cuts from €5.8 billion to €1.5 billion in the proposed EU budget. This goes against the needs" (Sikorski and Byczewska, 2020). This decision is worrying, especially from the perspective of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, for which projects that increase security and defense are of particular importance. The activities initiated in 2019 were postponed and materialized only in the current financial plan at a significantly lower level. This resulted in a decrease in the interest of potential beneficiaries to apply for funding for particularly significant projects, as it was believed that with such a low budget, all the funds could be absorbed by one costly project, such as the reconstruction of the broad-gauge railroad terminal at the Polish-Lithuanian border. However, it is to be expected that in the long run, the outlays will increase, among other things, as a result of the stabilization of the situation related to the pandemic, with the simultaneous popularization of the importance of military mobility, as well as the growing uncertainty around the actions of Russia and other threats emerging in the EU environment.

However, funding constraints are not the only obstacle to the development of security and defense-related ventures. Other challenges and threats that may significantly impede this process are the difficulty of defining strategic autonomy as a narrative for the European political project, the EU's lack of accountability and transparency in defense matters, reductions in European defense funding, and, most recently, the coronavirus pandemic (based on Csernaton, 2020). The difficulties and problems identified require a strategic consensus, which may be difficult to achieve in a post-pandemic reality. Nevertheless, achieving the EU's ability to respond to emerging crises and threats, including those of a military nature, is not another step in its development process but definitely a necessity.

Further work on military mobility must consider multiple aspects and involve multiple actors at different levels. Threats and challenges related to the vulnerability of transportation infrastructure to cyber-attacks and, as a result, slowing down the movement of troops or preventing it altogether, the possibility of not being able to use member states' seaports and airports held by other states (e.g., China and Russia) remain. Furthermore, the loss of critical data as a result of hostile cyber-attacks, digitization of information sharing and administrative handling, are just some of the elements that need to be taken into account.

In addition, the possibility of inviting third parties to cooperate should be kept in mind. This can bring tangible benefits, especially given the unpredictable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on European countries' economies. Furthermore, "third countries can contribute relevant capacities for military operations, technological know-how as well as research and development. Their participation also facilitates closer EU working relationships with neighbors and non-EU NATO allies, helping safeguard NATO unity" (Brudzińska and Roos, 2020). According to experts, the solutions currently adopted by the EU provide for the possibility of such cooperation, but the conditions for its accession are quite restrictive and "satisfy only the closest partners of choice like the United States, Norway, and the United Kingdom. In other words, the doors will remain closed to, for example, Turkey and China" (Brudzińska and Roos, 2020).

An example of good practice and a proper approach to the discussed issue remains the Netherlands, which is the undisputed leader in the area of developing military mobility and is a critical transit nation for the armed forces of the US, Canada, and the UK. The Dutch authorities have initiated several undertakings to facilitate the movement of armed forces across this country's territory, such as creating 24/7 - a single point of contact for all transit applicants or the creation of logistic centers along multimodal corridors. Military mobility was included as one of the essential elements in the document *Defense vision 2035, Fighting for a safer future*.

The last element worth emphasizing in the development of military mobility is the particular importance of civil-military cooperation. Most of the transport will be carried out using commercial actors, so effective communication of these actors with local civilian authorities and the military will be crucial. In this context, it is worth emphasizing the need for realistic drills and simulations to identify existing gaps and obstacles in the transport network.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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