

Finabel



**On the
Way
Towards
A True
Military
Mobility**

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FINABEL

European Army Interoperability Center

MILITARY MOBILITY ISSUES

September 2017, on the tarmac of Papa Air base in Hungary, U.S.-led paratroopers were simulating an airborne operation aimed at repelling an enemy force occupying a NATO ally territory. During the exercises, Hodges, commanding general of the United States Army Europe, was informed that his helicopter would have to divert from its intended route in order to clear customs in Romania. Such passport and customs checks constitute typical routine in Europe since military personnel and equipment are still subject to physical, legal and regulatory barriers. Those obstacles could lead to delays, which even if they are not hugely time-consuming, represent a bureaucratic burden that poses a risk to military speed and efficiency.

Although the latter would not be, according to officials, a big issue during a real military emergency – NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Europe would simply warn allies and deploy as needed –, they still impede peacetime exercises and planning, needed for NATO's deterrence mission for instance. Furthermore, infrastructure challenges need to be taken up as well.

This short food for thought paper aims to discuss the existing barriers of the European military mobility, to contextualise the existing efforts in this field and to put forward a few recommendations.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Significant remaining obstacles still prevent the fluid movement of troops across the European territory.

It is possible to identify three different types of barriers: physical, legal and regulatory/administrative ones. The physical barriers concern the existing transportation infrastructure of the European territory and the question whether it is sufficiently developed to ensure the safe and quick transportation of troops, vehicles and weapons, anywhere needed. Legal barriers refer to the power states enjoy regarding foreign troops on their territory, like the sovereign right to refuse access to territory, the distinction between transit and settlement or the need for clearance to cross the border. Although these types of barriers remain the easiest to overcome – especially in case of emergency –, they still constitute a brake to the continuous accomplishment of military exercises or resettlements. Finally, the regulatory barriers are the set of rules indirecting

impeding the rapid movement of troops, like different national speed limits, tolls, police controls, obligation to declare what is shipped, prohibition to use specific roads, bridges or tunnels with dangerous materials, etc.

Since barriers are identifiable, why aren't they removed yet?

First of all, European military mobility is a cross-sectoral and multi-level issue. It makes intervene an imbriglio of European, national and sub-regional public and private actors. Cross-sectoral because different departments have their say in the management of the roads, railways or airways. For instance, speed limit is a question of both traffic (transport) and public health (awareness billboards) and is enforced by the police (home affairs). Any attempt to change the speed limit to enhance military mobility would therefore impact the work of these three ministerial departments.

Multi-level also, because different levels of power are in charge of the transport network. In most countries, the management, exploitation and maintenance of roads are devolved to subnational entities (municipalities, regions) depending on their size, place and capacity. In some states, like France, private actors can even be in charge of maintaining the roads.

Second, there is not enough incentives to achieve complete military mobility. The necessity of a 'military Schengen' is not self-evident, in part because Europeans do not perceive concrete and imminent threats. Besides, governments do not feel the need to deeply reform their legislation, regulation and infrastructure or to disrupt their traffic in peacetime if they know they would more easily legislate and adopt the necessary ordinances in a state of war.

Last but not least, infrastructure adaptation comes at high costs. If any bridge across the EU territory had to be rebuilt so as to support the weight of a German Leopard tank (68 tons, 3.75 meter wide), states would go bankrupt.

EXISTING EFFORTS

At the European level, the work of the European Defence Agency on this matter can be followed by three successive steps. First of all, in 2010, the EDA planned with 14 member states to harmonise and standardise cross-bordering process for troops and military goods



through the so-called 'EU Multimodal Transport Hub system' (M2TH). Nevertheless, the EDA M2TH appears to be more a discussion forum than an effective action plan. Only last year 13 member states signed a 'Project Arrangement' planned to contribute to the development of the M2TH.

Second, the 'Diplomatic Clearance' for military transport aircraft provides a simple and fast administrative procedure concerning itinerary of military flights. The European Union Diplomatic Clearance (DIC) Form V5 might give guidelines for the member states to create a similar form for military land forces transport.

Finally, the European Commission announces that an Action Plan on Military Mobility will be launched on March 2018, in collaboration with EDA which is "the best platform for the EU to build a comprehensive action plan"¹.

Besides, in the framework of PESCO, 24 member states have also planned to launch a cooperative project on 'Military Mobility'. The aim of the project is to "simplify and standardize cross-border military transport procedures" by relieving the administrative heaviness between member states. The statement of the project takes into account the infrastructure issue concerning overweight vehicles which cannot drive across roadways and bridges.

At NATO level, the 302-Form contains a special provision concerning the freedom of movement for military equipments and transports of NATO forces within the EU area. This 'area' includes EU member states which are also members of NATO. The provision gives NATO forces a particular form on mobility.

Cooperation and interoperability on military mobility are also a matter of multinational organisations such as the Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) which brings together EU members, the United States, Canada and Turkey. The mission of the Inland Surface Transport Cell (ISTC) is to coordinate participant's strategic lift on Inland Surface Transport (also Air and Sea Transport) to identify and facilitate available transportation assets with a focus on rail, road and inland waterways.

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(1) European Defense Agency, Press Release, "EDA provides expert input for action plan on military mobility", Brussels, November 10, 2017. Available on: <https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/press-centre/latest-press-releases/2017/11/10/eda-provides-expert-input-for-action-plan-on-military-mobility>



SUGGESTIONS

In order to step forward regarding military mobility, Finabel has identified a few ideas that deserve to be considered.

1) Network and itineraries

- Elaborate scenarios and develop reaction plans: at the highest level (NATO, EU);
- Screen member states' transport infrastructure: identify itineraries that could sustain the transit of troops and materials;
- Adapt future infrastructure: from now on, every new road (established according to a precise itinerary) should comply with the technical requirements (weight, width, height) states agree on.

2) Coordination and resource deficit

- Use military standards in the implementation of the EU infrastructure plan (TEN-T);
- Support collectively the costs of specific requirements: Peripheral states should not bear alone the cost of stocking and hosting troops.

3) Specific issues

- Determine how to combine states' sovereignty with military transit;
- Distinguish circumstances for which civilian traffic can be interrupted (Russia's invasion) and those for which civilian traffic should not be interrupted (military exercises);
- Prioritise public interests: environmental norms, health standards or military requirements (transfer of dangerous goods);
- Enhance dialogue and cooperation between military and civilian authorities (data exchange on traffic, ...).

Created in 1953, the Finabel committee is the oldest military organisation for cooperation between European Armies: it was conceived as a forum for reflections, exchange studies, and proposals on common interest topics for the future of its members. Finabel, the only organisation at this level, strives at:

- Promoting interoperability and cooperation of armies, while seeking to bring together concepts, doctrines and procedures;
- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and ad hoc coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



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