



MILITARY MOBILITY: STRATEGIC RELEVANCE, STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES AND DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION FOR ROMANIA

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NATO and the European Union have once again considered military mobility as a fundamental strategic priority over the past decade. The war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022, the pressure on NATO's eastern flank and the need to be able to deploy troops and equipment quickly from Western Europe to the Eastern Flank have highlighted a simple truth: without military mobility, there is no credible deterrence.

Romania's strategic location in the Black Sea means that this capacity is crucial for both interoperability and national resilience. This article analyses the logistical and legal obstacles of military mobility, EU and NATO initiatives, as well as Romania's responsibilities in implementing the National Military Mobility Plan.

Keywords: military mobility; connectivity; Eastern Flank; NATO; European Union;



MILITARY MOBILITY – FROM CONCEPT TO STRATEGIC NECESSITY

Military mobility refers to the ability of armed forces to move rapidly: through adapted infrastructure, harmonised legal procedures and modern logistical capabilities. It is a concept with military and civilian implications, as critical infrastructure – roads, bridges, railways, ports, airports – must serve both defence and economic needs. The concept of *military mobility* – although not a new one – was first raised in 2017¹ by General (r.) Ben Hodges, during his tenure as commander of the EUCOM land component (US Army Europe), speaking of the necessity for a *military Schengen* and thus expressing the need for mobility of allied forces comparable to the free movement of goods and people within the Schengen area. The need for military mobility – being emphasized by a commander who had the overall picture of all Allied forces in Europe and who drew attention to the excessive length of time it took to obtain transit permits, including in states like Germany – thus became all the more valid.

It is useful to emphasize from the outset that *military mobility* as a concept is managed from a national, allied and European perspective – and the success of the concept's implementation is deeply determined by the synergy between the three approaches.

Thus, the European Union (EU) views military mobility through two major lenses: financing *dual-use infrastructure* capable of supporting heavy military vehicles; and *harmonizing legal procedures*, through the Military Mobility Package, aimed at reducing approval times for the transit of troops and equipment across borders. The EU's ambitions are, however, limited by the funding available.

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¹ NATO in Europe needs 'military Schengen' to rival Russia (12 September 2017), Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-in-europe-needs-military-schengen-to-rival-russian-mobility/a-40470302>.



Military mobility in the EU context is conceived within the general framework provided by the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) – a Union policy and infrastructure framework that aims to create a coherent network of transport infrastructure (roads, railways, ports, airports etc.) connecting all EU regions; eliminate bottlenecks and cross-border gaps; provide accessibility and efficiency for people and goods throughout the EU.

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The latest *Military Mobility Package* – issued in November 2025 by the European Commission – includes a proposed EU-wide regulation that sets clear rules for the movement of troops and equipment between states, reiterates the limitation of the approval time to a maximum of 3 days – in line with the *Military Mobility Pledge* of 2024² – and simplifies customs and border formalities. As a main objective, the Package establishes the creation, by the end of 2027, of an *EU-Wide Military Mobility Area* as a first step towards achieving a “*Military Schengen*” in terms of legal, infrastructure and capabilities. The document also proposes the creation of a European

² Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defence, Council of the European Union, 27 May 2024, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9225-2024-INIT/en/pdf>.

Military Mobility Enhanced Response System/EMERS as an emergency tool for cross-border military transport and draws attention to the fact that, at Union level, national contact points in this field are not yet very clearly known. In this context, an important role is played by the *PESCO projects on military mobility*³, which aimed, among other things, to complete a list of national contact points in the field, as well as by the project on the network of *logistics hubs in Europe and support for operations* (NetLogHubs), which aims to improve infrastructure planning and coordination.

Thus, for the EU and its Member States, the *TEN-T is the physical backbone of cross-border mobility* – civil and military, and the *Military Mobility Package and the Military Mobility Pledge provide the legal and procedural framework* that allows for the rapid and efficient use of this infrastructure for defence purposes. In essence, *these initiatives work synergistically*: the TEN-T corridors provide the routes, and the Mobility Package and Pledge make them rapidly and legally accessible for military operations throughout the EU.

On the other hand, *NATO's role is strategic, operational, standardisation and coordination*, with no responsibilities for financing the infrastructure of its Member States. The main instrument is the Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC), responsible for planning troop movements, assessing the Allied logistical route, standardising military infrastructure requirements and managing logistical flows in crisis scenarios.

Thus, while the EU provides the funding and the common legal framework, NATO sets the standards and operational requirements. The two organizations converge, in practice, towards a common mobility architecture, but responsibilities remain distinct.



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³ Coordinated by the Netherlands, which also has a National Mobility Plan with responsibilities clearly established, <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-965640.pdf>.



ROMANIA IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT: FROM STRATEGIC DEPENDENCY TO KEY ACTOR

The Strategic Relevance of Military Mobility for Romania

Romania's geostrategic positioning – a NATO and EU border state, in the Black Sea region and on the border with Ukraine – makes military mobility a national security priority. Even without imposing itself as a strategic objective, Romania is a critical logistical node, and military mobility thus becomes a test of strategic credibility for Romania both within NATO and within the European Union.

Given that, in crisis or conflict scenarios on the eastern flank, the flows of troops, equipment, ammunition and heavy equipment must quickly cross the national territory, military mobility brings multiple benefits: it increases the credibility of NATO deterrence, by ensuring the capacity to rapidly reinforce the eastern flank; it contributes to Romania's security, reducing logistical vulnerability; it supports logistical aid for Ukraine; and it supports NATO-EU interoperability, a major strategic objective of the European security and defence policy. Thus, from a political point of view, military mobility becomes an indicator of Romania's administrative and logistical capacity to act as a responsible host state in an alliance.

At the national level, Romania has as its instrument the *National Military Mobility Plan* – the most recent version being approved in 2025 – a key document that identifies priority infrastructure projects (strategic roads, bridges, railway routes), integration into EU and NATO networks and proposes the interconnection of national transport networks with European strategic corridors. Significant projects include bridge reinforcements, the modernization of logistics hubs and plans for transnational corridors connecting the Black Sea to Central Europe.

In a regional context, Romania took political steps in 2024 to join a series of military mobility corridors – trilateral initiatives with Bulgaria and Turkey, with Bulgaria and Greece, joining the Pan-European Military Mobility Corridor VIII, alongside Albania, Bulgaria, Italy and the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as projects to connect Black Sea ports with Central Europe. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen the role of the port of Constanța and the military bases in Cincu and Mihail Kogălniceanu.

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Logistical, Legal and Procedural Limitations

Romania's military mobility is primarily affected by the *limitations of the road and rail infrastructure*, which is not yet fully adapted for heavy military transport. Numerous road sections and railway lines have restrictions on carrying capacity, gauge or speed, which makes it difficult to move convoys and bulky equipment quickly.

Added to this is the *inter-ministerial bureaucracy* associated with the process of approving military movements and transits. The procedures involve multiple institutions – defence, internal affairs, transport, foreign affairs – with different, sometimes divergent administrative flows, which generates delays in issuing permits for special transports, dangerous materials or classified equipment.

Another obstacle is the *lack of a single civil-military coordination mechanism*. In the absence of a central structure to manage requests, logistical flows, authorization procedures and the relationship with NATO and EU partners in an integrated manner, the process may remain fragmented and dependent on bilateral initiatives between institutions, which limits efficiency and predictability.

Last but not least, the *logistical capacity of ports and airports* is still under the level required by NATO. Both the heavy load handling facilities and the spaces dedicated to the reception and processing of large flows of personnel and equipment may be insufficient for rapid mobilization scenarios. This gap affects Romania's potential to function as a regional logistics hub for allied operations. Thus, at the national level, there is a lack of modern logistics hubs, developed according to NATO standards, which would allow the storage, sorting, maintenance and distribution of military equipment in an interoperable manner. Without these logistical centres of gravity, supply flows remain dispersed, resulting in difficulties in operational coordination and reducing the efficiency of the logistics chain in high-intensity situations.

Financing Military Mobility: Between National Responsibility and External Support

Military mobility is an area where financial responsibility is shared. Thus, *national responsibility is key*. Romania must mainly finance its own infrastructure (roads, bridges, railways), the digitalization of transit procedures and all structures associated with the concept.



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The EU's responsibility is complementary, ensuring co-financing for projects to adapt TEN-T corridors for dual use (bridges, roads, railways, ports, airports) through the Connecting Europe Facility/CEF; support for the harmonisation of procedures and standards; or structural funds for strategic regions. Thus, EU funds cover only part of the total costs.

Recommendations

According to the EU Military Mobility Package, Form 302, used within the EU and NATO, generates numerous bottlenecks in practice, mainly due to different interpretations applied at the level of customs structures. The lack of a unified understanding of the regulations leads to situations where the same document is accepted at one border crossing point and rejected at another, without a clear or coherent justification.

Reducing procedural barriers is an essential condition for increasing military mobility in Romania. A first step is the *implementation of a single digital system for approving military transit*, which would allow for real-time management of requests and reduce administrative delays. This system should consolidate all authorization flows into a single platform, facilitating the coordination of the institutions involved and ensuring transparency in the decision-making process. Also, according to the EU Military Mobility Package, *Form 302, used within the EU and NATO*, generates numerous bottlenecks in practice, mainly due to different interpretations applied at the level of customs structures. The lack of a unified understanding of the regulations leads to situations where the same document is accepted at one border crossing point and rejected at another, without a clear or coherent justification. Although the documents have similar purposes, they are based on different legal frameworks, and their selective application, depending on local interpretations or context, affects the predictability of the procedures. Thus, in order to remedy these dysfunctions, concrete action can be taken at the national level by creating a single procedure for the use of Form 302. This national procedure must be the result of an inter-institutional approval and be mandatory for all customs and border structures.

In addition, it is necessary to create a *National Centre for Military Mobility*, coordinated by the Government, which would function as an integrated operational and strategic management structure. Such a centre could ensure permanent monitoring of transits, analysis of logistical capacities and communication with NATO and EU partners and *would respond to the requirement* in the EU Military Mobility Package regarding the establishment of a *National Coordinator*



for Military Transport⁴. In parallel, it is necessary to establish a formal civil-military coordination mechanism between the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, by harmonizing procedures and adopting a clear framework of responsibilities, in order to eliminate overlaps and inter-institutional blockages.

Infrastructure modernization remains a critical pillar for military mobility. Romania must prioritize, if necessary, including through dedicated government decisions, infrastructure projects with direct relevance for NATO and the EU. They include *the strengthening of critical bridges, located on the directions of operational interest, and the modernization of strategic railway lines on the south-east and north-south axes*, indispensable for the transport of heavy equipment. At the same time, *expanding the capacity of the Constanta port is essential*, given its central role in regional logistics flows and the potential to become a major entry node for allied forces. To ensure the sustainability of these investments, dual-use criteria should be introduced in all new infrastructure projects, so that they can serve both civilian and military needs. Also, the development of logistics hubs compatible with NATO standards, in locations such as Constanța and Cincu would provide the capacity to quickly and efficiently integrate extensive flows of troops and equipment.

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In terms of financing and governance, it is necessary *to increase the share of dual-use projects in the national budget*, so that the modernization of critical infrastructure can be sustainable and predictable. This approach can be complemented by the development of public-private co-financing models, which would accelerate the implementation of essential projects and attract additional technical expertise, as well as by capitalizing on the Security Action for Europe/SAFE financial instrument, through which Romania was allocated 16.68 billion euros. A robust monitoring mechanism is also indispensable: the annual assessment of progress would provide a clear picture of the stage of implementation and would contribute to maintaining positive institutional pressure to comply with the established objectives.

⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on Military Mobility, 19 November 2025, European Commission, <https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/Action%20plan%20on%20military%20mobility%202.0.pdf>, p. 13.



Military mobility is one of the essential components of modern defence. For Romania, it is not only an obligation generated by NATO and EU membership, but also a strategic necessity for its own security.

Overall, these measures would strengthen the strategic governance of military mobility and position Romania as a credible and efficient actor in the Euro-Atlantic logistics architecture.

CONCLUSION

Military mobility is one of the essential components of modern defence. For Romania, it is not only an obligation generated by NATO and EU membership, but also a *strategic necessity for its own security*. Thus, in the context of the security situation in the Black Sea region, Romania is facing a logistical and institutional transformation essential for its credibility as an allied state.

The implementation of the National Military Mobility Plan, integration into the EU package of documents and collaboration with NATO are necessary and essential steps – but the speed and consistency of investments will determine whether Romania can truly become a military mobility hub in the region or will remain a vulnerable point in an increasingly tense geopolitical context. Progress depends on rapid measures: a single coordination structure, priority investments in dual-use infrastructure and full integration into NATO and EU mechanisms.

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