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MILITARY MOBILITY DEVELOPMENT: THE SITUATION NOW AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Analytical review

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Summary

- In armed conflicts of today, military mobility is one of the key factors helping to deter an adversary's actions. The effectiveness of Lithuania's defence and the country's defensibility directly depend on smooth and quick deployment of NATO Allies' forces in our country.
- When faced with a military threat, the security of Lithuania directly depends on the speed with which NATO Allies' forces can be redeployed to our country, and it is therefore essential to ensure that military mobility becomes one of the key national security priorities with sufficient resources and effort provided for it. It should be emphasised that military mobility primarily serves as a deterrent. However, the



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benefits gained from it – in the form of a well-developed national transport infrastructure – serve the well-being of the society at large.

- NATO documents and multiple security studies of the last few years have all emphasised the pressing need to develop synergies between NATO, EU institutions and EU Member States so as to resolve military mobility vulnerabilities in Europe, because the political and institutional instruments that help to resolve most of the issues in this field lie precisely in the hands of the EU and the national governments.
- On 10 July 2018 the EU and NATO signed a joint declaration, making military mobility one of the key areas of EU-NATO cooperation. It involves regular reports on the progress made in developing transport infrastructure, improving procedures and optimising cross-border transportation authorisation procedures.
- The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – a multi-year (2021–2027) financial programme instrument – allocated the funding of EUR 1.5bn (or EUR 1.69bn in today's prices) for improving military mobility.
- There are several specific priorities set for transport infrastructure development in Lithuania (such as renewing infrastructure of the Via Baltica route segment between Marijampolė and the Lithuanian border; constructing Kaunas Intermodal Terminal (with the 1435 mm standard gauge) that meet the needs of military transportation and additional facilities as part of the Rail Baltica railway development project), but the needs in this field are greater than that. For example, it is essential to set up a second military mobility corridor, namely the Augustów (Poland) – Lazdijai – Alytus – Vilnius route, because relying on a single land route (the Via Baltica) for military needs is neither safe, nor effective. The Lithuanian Armed Forces have prepared a list of transport infrastructure development needs for improving military mobility, which specifies more than twenty public sector infrastructure items, which must be improved or have yet to be built.
- Military mobility development efforts have already shown some clear results: thanks to the joint effort of Lithuanian institutions, certain infrastructure improvement works have already been completed; Lithuanian institutions have managed to speed up the issuing of authorisations for Allies' requests to arrive to Lithuania; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Transport and Communications are cooperating with each other on preparing an application for EU funds to co-finance the dual-use TEN-T transport network.
- It is essential to improve inter-agency coordination, especially with respect to planning and allocating funds for infrastructure development projects. This would likely help reach the needed decisions in a more effective manner – primarily, to prepare and approve the national military mobility plan and improve the national legislation needed to resolve other issues related to military mobility.

Introduction

mobility of the armed forces – in both domestic and cross-border operations – is one of the key elements of a country's defence capabilities, which decides the success of a military operation. In armed conflicts of today, speed is a decisive factor – especially in deterring an enemy, as they will know that help can show up very quickly.

The effectiveness of Lithuania's defence and the country's defensibility directly depend on smooth and quick deployment of allies' forces in our country. Another alternative would be a permanent presence of NATO forces of sufficient size in Lithuania, but this would also require an appropriate transport infrastructure. The ability of our allies' forces to be smoothly and quickly redeployed in Lithuania and move inside it is one of the key requirements of adversary deterrence and operational defensibility – or an essential prerequisite of defence. Therefore, if we are to strengthen our country's defence capabilities, improving military mobility should be a national security priority.

NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (AAP-06 Edition 2013) defines mobility as “a quality or capability of military forces which permits them to move from place to place while retaining the ability to fulfil their primary mission.”¹ The concept of military mobility encompasses the transportation of personnel and technical equipment, logistic support and legal aspects, including custom rules and cross border permissions, issuance of diplomatic clearances and other legal procedures related to land, air and maritime border crossing.

Security environment changes and challenges of the recent years have forced NATO countries to strengthen their defence, and military mobility has been named a key priority in this respect. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the ramped-up NATO military exercis-

es in Europe have exposed certain obstacles to the movement of military units across Europe. In 2017, great resonance was drawn a criticism by the then-commanding general of United States Army Europe, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, regarding difficulties in moving a military convoy across Europe: *“More than anything we need a military Schengen zone, something that would allow a military convoy to move across Europe as fast as a migrant is able to move across Europe.”*² During the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, cognizant of these security vulnerabilities, the Allies approved the NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI), identifying improved military mobility within the Alliance and outside it as one of the key commitments.³ In the declaration signed by Heads of State and Government, it was emphasized that *“NATO's efforts to ensure a coherent approach and synergies with the EU in the area of military mobility should be pursued, including with regard to military mobility related procedures that should apply to all Allies equally.”*⁴ This declaration has served, among other things, to foster a political dialogue between NATO and the EU on addressing and solving military mobility issues⁵.

Over the last few years, military mobility issues have been discussed and presented to the wider public by multiple research centres and renowned security and military experts. One noteworthy analytical study of this kind was by former (2016–2019) Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and retired General Curtis Scaparrotti and former US Ambassador to Hungary Colleen Bell, titled *“Moving – Out. A Comprehensive Assessment of European Military Mobility”* and published by the Atlantic Council in April 2020.⁶

Perhaps the most comprehensive study on the topic of military mobility was prepared by the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). Titled *“Moving Mountains for Europe's Defense”*, the study presents several possible scenarios of redeploying Armed Forc-

es of NATO's nations in Eastern Europe, the associated challenges, detailed solutions and recommendations.⁷

This analytical review discusses the EU's progress in improving military mobility, details some of Lithuania's achievements in this field in order to identify their main shortcomings, and offers recommendations for improving Lithuania's military mobility to better serve the interests of the country. Although this is a highly cross cutting topic, this review mainly focuses on transport infrastructure, the improvement of which is the most pressing issue when it comes to strengthening Lithuania's military mobility.

It should be noted that the key political and institutional tools for the development of military mobility lie in the hands of the EU and its Member States, while NATO has significantly fewer of them at its disposal. For this reason and also due to the fact that, in the context of NATO defence planning, information of this kind is not public, this review will not be analysing the Alliance's activities in strengthening military mobility. One document that strictly needs to be mentioned, however, is the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation signed by the EU and NATO on 10 July 2018⁸, which commits both organisations to strengthen their cooperation. The declaration names military mobility as a priority commitment.

This review uses publicly available EU documents and other publicly accessible studies, as well as the information shared by responsible EU and Lithuanian officials.

1 EU activities and measures for strengthening military mobility

Improving military mobility became a concern for the EU in 2017. Table 1 lists the main documents of the European Commission and the European External Action Service initiating the activities and measures for developing the military mobility among EU Member States.

In July 2020, the EU Council allocated funding for EU defence and security. For this purpose, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – a multi-year (2021–2027) financial programme instrument – allocated the funding of EUR 1.5bn (or EUR 1.69bn in today's prices). Despite representing an important achievement in terms fixing the shortcomings in this priority are of the EU, the allocated funding is glaringly insufficient in view of the initially proposed EUR 6.9bn.⁹ It is important to note that the EU can use the CEF programme to finance only up to 50% of the project's total cost and only provided that the applicant Member State commits to cover the remaining costs and the project falls within the category of dual-use (civilian-military) projects on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

The European Commission invites applications from 16 September 2021 to 19 January 2022 for CEF infrastructure project development, planning to spend EUR 330m (in today's prices) on dual-use military mobility projects within the TEN-T network.

Deserving a separate mention is the European Defence Agency (EDA) programme on "Optimising Cross-Border Movement Permission procedures in Europe." To implement this programme, a dedicated Task Force was created within the EDA format, headed by Lithuania. The Task Force has a goal of shortening the time it

Table 1. Main documents of the European Commission and the European External Action Service

Document date, ref. No.	Title	Objectives and content
10.11.2017, JOIN/2017/41 final ¹⁰	Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council on Improving Military Mobility in the European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies physical, legal and regulatory barriers hampering military mobility; Defines the areas where the EU could contribute with the view to improving military mobility and lists possible measures.
28.03.2018, JOIN(2018) 5 final ¹¹	Joint Communication of the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Action Plan on Military Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the actions and means for improving military mobility, defining areas for dual-use (civilian-military) projects, namely transport infrastructure and procedural and regulatory issues; Commits to evaluate and present the progress made by providing annual reports.
24.09.2021, JOIN(2021) 26 final ¹²	Joint Report of the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility from October 2020 to September 2021 (third, the most relevant report)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents the progress made in setting military requirements, developing transport infrastructure, improving procedures (transport of dangerous goods, customs and VAT regulation) and optimising cross-border transportation authorisation procedures.



Figure 1. The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), which can receive funding from the CEF programme.

takes to obtain cross-border movement authorisations and to streamline and standardise military movement procedures. This is especially relevant in cases where military units cross the borders of Europe's largest countries (i.e. France, Germany and Poland), which often apply different and complicated procedures. Notably, the recommendations of this Task Force (as with any other EU and EDA task force) are non-binding – i.e. once the recommendation is approved, it only becomes binding if Member States turn into national legislation.

Military mobility in the EU is also implemented via projects within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework. Out of 47 PESCO projects currently being implemented, the Military Mobility project appears to be top priority, with 25 EU Member States taking part (i.e. all participants in the PESCO framework). As of May 2021, this project is joined by the US, Canada and Norway¹³, making it the first such project with participants from outside the EU. There is reason to hope that their participation will significantly strengthen the EU-NATO cooperation in the field of military mobility. The implementation of this project is coordinated by the Netherlands and it aims to lend support to the states' commitments to simplify the movement of military personnel and resources via EU railways, roads and by air or sea. In effect, this project provides a strategic-political platform for countries to resolve military mobility issues, share experience and national-level solutions for improving military mobility. The PESCO project also includes specific goals:

- Persons of Contact assigned by the countries should ensure that “one stop shop” principle is adhered to for resolving issues related to military mobility and performing the necessary administrative procedures such as submitting/issuing border crossing requests/permits. This facilitates the cre-

ation of a single information exchange network within the PESCO project framework;

- The countries commit to prepare and approve national-level military mobility plans (*Lithuania has yet to prepare a plan of this kind*).

2 Lithuania: military mobility issues, vulnerabilities and solutions

2.1 Functions and responsibilities of the institutions

The programme of the 18th Government sets out to “seek that Lithuania makes use of the opportunities for cooperation and financing offered by EU defence initiatives in strategically important areas, such as military mobility, combating hybrid threats, cybersecurity and disinformation, and promoting defence innovations.”¹⁴ The Government's National Plan for Progress 2021 – 2030 enshrines the objective of setting up and adapting the transport infrastructure necessary for military movement by 2030 – but only those segments of the TEN-T network railway and road infrastructure that meet the military mobility requirements¹⁵.

Resolution No. 98 of 25 January 2012, “On the Approval of Tasks for State and Municipal Institutions as Part of Providing Host-Country Support”¹⁶, defines specific tasks for Lithuanian institutions as part of providing host-country support (i.e. hosting NATO Allies' Armed Forces). The tasks set out for the Ministry of Transport and Communications and organisations under it include repairs and reconstruction of relevant roads and railway constructions. This Government Resolution appears to be the main document specifying the tasks for various institutions as part of the implementation of host-country support measures, includ-

ing creating proper conditions for a quick arrival of Allies to Lithuania and their movement within the country alongside the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF).

The 2020 Activity Report of the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania (MOND) underscores the importance of military mobility.¹⁷ The 2021–2023 Strategic Activity Plan (approved by 25 October 2021 Order No. V-817 of the Ministry of National Defence) for the Minister's of National Defence areas of governance includes a commitment to expand and improve the country's military mobility capacities, primarily through participation in EU initiatives.

The MOND and LAF are the main institutions initiating procedure improvements or infrastructure development with the view to improving military mobility. The Ministry of Transport and Communications and the institutions under it (e.g., Lithuanian Railways, seaports and airports, other transport infrastructure companies) contribute to improving military mobility by implementing relevant projects.

LAF are responsible hosting the military units of NATO Allies and partner-nations and organising military movement within Lithuania's territory. The Movement Control Centre (JKC) of the Lithuanian Armed Forces controls arrivals and departures of foreign military personnel and equipment to/from the Republic of Lithuania or their transit through Lithuania's territory; JKC also controls the transportation of military personnel, military units and military equipment through the territory of foreign countries and within Lithuania using all modes of transport.¹⁸

The Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for infrastructure development for all modes of transport and for shaping, organising, coordinating and controlling adherence to passenger and goods transpor-

tation policies, including dangerous goods. These functions of the Ministry of Transport and Communications *inter alia* include dual-use (civilian-military) transport infrastructure development.

Diplomats from the Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union and representatives from the Ministry of National Defence and other institutions contribute to military mobility development by participating in various task forces or other EU working groups.

2.2 Key infrastructure development needs

Based on the information provided by the MOND and LAF representatives, the key challenge in ensuring a smooth and quick arrival of Allies' Forces to Lithuania has to do with transport infrastructure development. Currently, various procedures (border-crossing permissions, diplomatic clearances) do not pose significant obstacles to the arrival of Allies' troops and equipment to Lithuania or movement within its territory (it is admitted, however, that there are procedural obstacles hampering the movement of Allies in other EU countries such as Germany and Poland).

Transport infrastructure is part of the public sector, but is also used by the armed forces. The country's transport infrastructure is being developed based on national security and defence needs, but better roads, railways and ports are used by everyone in the country.

LAF have prepared and submitted a list of land, air and sea transport infrastructure development priorities for improving military mobility. The top priority on the list is the improvement of the Via Baltica (E67) route segment between the Polish border and Marijampolė. This road is main mobility corridor for the arrival of Allies to Lithuania. Accompanying it at the very top of the priority list is the Rail Balti-

ca railway, connecting Lithuania and Poland. To improve military mobility, the Rail Baltica project implementation plan must necessarily involve the development of the railway infrastructure in Kazlų Rūda and reconstruction of Kaunas Intermodal Terminal (with the EU 1435 mm standard gauge) by installing a loading bay and other structures adapted to military transportation needs.

One formal obstacle here, however, is the fact public infrastructure development is at odds with the defined purposes of National Defence System investments: the existing investment programmes do not allow the Ministry of National Defence to use defence funding for building roads, bridges and railways. This is why the Ministry of National Defence, along with the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has requested the Government of Lithuania and the Ministry of Finance for additional funds for implementing the aforementioned priority items. It should be noted that these infrastructure items meet the conditions for co-funding from the EU: they are dual-use (civilian-military) transport infrastructure items belonging to the TEN-T network. There are plans to request, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Ministry of Finance, the EU funding for dual-use infrastructure renewal funding. It is hoped that the Government of Lithuania (primarily, the Ministry of Finance) will be able to allocate the required funding for co-financing these projects, as this is a prerequisite for securing the funding from the EU.

Another important problem here is that land route E67 (the main military corridor) alone is not enough to ensure a quick and effective movement of Allies' military units. The only land transport artery would be too vulnerable in the event of a military crisis, nor does it have sufficient capacity. It is therefore essential to set up a second military mobility corridor, namely the Augustów (Poland) – Lazdijai –

Alytus – Vilnius route. Having a minimum of two land roads is the enabling condition of the arrival of Allies' military units to Lithuania. There are no other alternatives.

Since the Augustów – Lazdijai – Alytus route is not part of the TEN-T network, it currently doesn't meet EU funding criteria and is not eligible for EU support. The plan is to seek a change of status for this route on the EU level, i.e. to have it included in the TEN-T network. According to a representative of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, an agreement has already been reached with the Polish Government institutions regarding their support in the negotiations with the EU on including said route in the TEN-T network.

Military mobility development efforts have already shown results: thanks to the joint effort of the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Transport and Communications and Lithuanian Railways, a 600-metre railway branch line has been constructed between Pabradė and Pažeimenė, used by the military units deployed to Pabradė Training Area. With the funding from the US, a heavy equipment loading ramp was built in the Gaižiūnai railway station owned by Lithuanian Railways and some additional work was done to improve transport infrastructure. Also noteworthy is the joint work done by several Lithuanian institutions to speed up the issuing of authorisations for military movement (under earlier procedures, a request for permission for Allies to arrive would have to be submitted 5 working days prior, whereas now the request processing time can be cut to 24 hours if needed).

This review mentions only the most important, first-priority tasks that are essential to ensuring military mobility and the bare minimum needed for hosting Allies' armed forces. As mentioned above, LAF have prepared the list of transport infrastructure development priorities for improving military mobility, which in-

cludes, alongside the aforementioned first-priority infrastructure items, suggestions to build or improve various transport infrastructure items such as land roads (including overpasses and bridges), railway lines (including ramps, parking lots, unloading equipment and branch lines), port infrastructure for internal waters (rivers) and the modernisation of seaports and airports. This list includes more than twenty public sector transport infrastructure items in total. The development or reconstruction of transport infrastructure items in the second or third tier of LAF priorities should be planned for accordingly. Unfortunately, it has to be admitted that the needs of LAF continue to be ignored in Lithuanian public sector transport infrastructure development projects, with the exception of projects funded by the EU.

Conclusions

Improving military mobility and thus ensuring quick and smooth movement of military personnel and equipment is one of the key priorities of NATO and the EU. The security of Lithuania and the Baltic states directly depends on the speed with which NATO Allies' forces can be redeployed to Lithuania and Baltic region, and it is therefore essential to ensure that military mobility becomes one of the key national security priorities with sufficient resources and effort provided for it. It should be emphasised that military mobility primarily serves as a deterrent, but the benefits gained from it – in the form of a well-developed national transport infrastructure – also serve the well-being of the society at large.

The Ministry of National Defence is not able to allocate funds for public infrastructure (i.e. roads, railway lines, railway and road constructions, seaports and airports) development, and this type of work has to be funded from the budgets of other institutions, because all public transport infrastructure in the country

is civilian in nature. The label of “dual-use” infrastructure is only applied to the type of transport infrastructure that can be used in the interest of national security.

To take advantage of the EU initiative of providing up to 50% of the necessary funds through the Connecting Europe Facility, it is essential to submit applications for military mobility project funding by the start of next year; specifically, for improving the Via Baltica (E67) route segment between the Polish border and Marijampolė and the constructions outside it, and for reconstructing the Rail Baltica railway constructions. It is also essential to allocate necessary funding from Lithuania's national budget.

One of the key challenges to be address for Lithuania to do its “homework” with respect to improving military mobility is the strengthening of inter-institutional coordination. Because military mobility is often seen as the exclusive domain of the Lithuanian Armed Forces or the Ministry of National Defence, other state institutions do not pay very close attention to the issues in this field and ways in which *they* could contribute to facilitating a quicker movement of armed forces within the Lithuanian territory or across the border with neighbouring countries. While being a priority issue for NATO and the EU, military mobility is a priority issue in Lithuania only to the Defence Staff of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and, perhaps, the Ministry of National Defence. It does not seem as if the LAF list of transport infrastructure development priorities for improving military mobility is taken into account when planning the Lithuanian public sector transport infrastructure reconstruction works, except in cases when attempting to secure EU funding for items on the Trans-European Transport Network. Here one should mention, however, the progress made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Transport and Communications with respect to their

cooperation with each other on preparing an application for EU funds to co-finance the dual-use TEN-T transport network.

A smooth and quick arrival of Allies in response to threats should be a priority with respect to national in the most general sense and tangible progress is only possible applying harmonious Whole-of-Government approach. All the more so because the practical and technical measures of military mobility development fall within the competence of the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Ministry of Finance, while the Lithuanian Armed Forces can only supply the operational and technical requirements for improving military

mobility (which it does). Resolution No. 98 of the Government of Lithuania, mentioned above, commits state institutions to perform a set of specific actions. However, there is some doubt about its effectiveness due to potentially insufficient inter-institutional cooperation and coordination of activities. Improving inter-agency coordination, especially with respect to planning and allocating funds for infrastructure development projects, would likely help reach the needed decisions in a more effective manner – primarily, to prepare and approve the national military mobility plan and improve the national legislation needed to resolve other issues related to military mobility.

Endnotes

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