

SEA Naval Position Paper on the Inclusion of the Naval dimension in the Military Mobility Initiative

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Military Mobility, as currently conceived, aims to **enhance the movement of military assets across borders quickly and efficiently in times of crisis or conflict**. Indeed, as highlighted in the European Commission's White Paper for European Defence (19/3/2025)¹, "Military Mobility is an essential enabler for European security and defence [...]". Across Europe's diverse maritime gateways — situated at the crossroads of the continent's key transport (TEN-T) axes — naval infrastructure underpins rapid deployment, logistical reach and strategic depth. However, to achieve this endeavour, it is critical to include all transport modes as well as redundancies. The White Paper mentions having "identified four priority multi-modal corridors (rail, road, sea, air) for military mobility in case of short-notice and large-scale movements of troops and equipment [which] need substantial and urgent investment". Military Mobility is also the focus of **one of the first wide-ranging PESCO projects** and represents a **key area for EU-NATO cooperation**.

However, for Europe to ensure credible deterrence, full-spectrum operability, and rapid reaction capability, it is imperative to **broaden the initiative to fully integrate relevant naval assets into the military mobility framework, in the same category with ports, terminals and other hotspots**. As a consequence, **dedicated investments will be required** for the upgrade and overhaul of shipbuilding and maintenance facilities. Ultimately, effective military mobility **depends on dual-use assets that must be constantly maintained and ready for rapid fit-out or refit in case of emergency**.

As representatives of the seven leading military shipyards and nearly 90% of naval systems integrators and shipbuilders in Europe, SEA Naval would therefore like to propose few concrete recommendations for such inclusion, which will help reinforce the EU's preparedness and operational readiness.

1) STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF NAVAL ASSETS AS KEY INFRASTRUCTURES FOR MILITARY MOBILITY

The maritime domain isn't just a **frontline** — as illustrated by recent events from the Baltic to the Red Sea, but also a **logistics backbone, essential to quickly move troops, equipment and supplies in the context of expeditionary and relief operations**. In order to facilitate those operations, it will be essential to **boost investments in strategic sealift and support capabilities (e.g. RoRo vessels, icebreakers, crew support ships, offshore support vessels)**, ensuring that such assets are considered as critical infrastructures in their own right - equal to maritime multi-modal transport corridors and hubs — and, as a consequence, benefit from funding under the Military Mobility framework. Further, investments in the naval domain allow to better protect the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), which is a core aspect to consider, to ensure a safe Military Mobility.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en?filename=White%20paper%20for%20European%20defence%20-%20Readiness%202030.pdf

2) SHIPYARDS AS MOBILITY ENABLERS AND STRATEGIC ASSETS

European naval shipyards, whether for newbuilds or for MRO (maintenance, repair, overhaul), are no longer just production sites; they are **strategic enablers of operational readiness and mobility**. They function as integration hubs for advanced defence and dual-use capabilities—rapid maintenance and retrofit centres that increasingly leverage AI-driven digitalisation in production and operations while adopting new, more efficient manufacturing methods and materials.

Besides, **investments in military mobility should be coherent with the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)**. It is important to invest in infrastructure upgrades of European shipyards, which are key infrastructure assets. Prioritizing European shipyards and integrators in infrastructure upgrades supports open strategic autonomy and the EU's ambition to reduce dependency on external actors. The shipbuilding industry's role as both a civil and military player uniquely positions it to contribute to the goals of cross-sectoral resilience and innovation.

3) STRATEGIC LEVERAGE OF DUAL-USE

Naval vessels are inherently **dual-use assets**, considered as strategic sealift platforms, capable of supporting humanitarian, maritime surveillance, deterrence patrols, and combat operations. Their deployment requires equally dual-use infrastructure – ports, shipyards, logistics hubs – that must be prepared, resilient, and rapidly adaptable for defence purposes. This readiness is a cornerstone of European strategic autonomy, and, as mentioned in the Commission's White Paper "their security, maintenance and repair also need to be assured." It also highlights that "Military Mobility can also be further strengthened by increased availability of specialised and dual-use transport assets in all transport modes." This includes embedding cyber-secure architectures, redundancy of critical yard utilities and rapid-response concepts to withstand hybrid disruptions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To that end, to better include the naval dimension, the Military Mobility initiative must:

1) Naval Mobility

- + Improve the **integration of sealift capabilities and other categories of naval vessels and within the military mobility framework as strategic infrastructures in their own right, on the same level with maritime multi-modal transport corridors and hubs.**
- + Recognize **naval corridors and port infrastructure** as part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) with defence-oriented upgrades, ensuring defence dimensions are included in maritime corridor planning.
- + **Define standards and interoperability requirements for port and naval logistics infrastructure**, aligned with existing framework (PESCO, NATO) and adapted to Naval Mobility framework.

2) Upgrade of Infrastructure

- + **Improve port and shipyard interoperability** across the EU for rapid naval deployment.

- + Extend the scope of the **Military Mobility initiative** to **Port and shipyard infrastructure** used for dual civil-military purposes.
- + **Consider the shipbuilding and ship repair facilities as Military Mobility enablers** through the conversion, adaptation and transformation of vessels into military logistics assets.
- + Integrate the **naval infrastructures and shipyard upgrades** under the Military Mobility fund and associated EU financing instruments.

3) Resilient & Future-Proof Naval Mobility Infrastructure

- + Naval-mobility investments must **strengthen the structural robustness of ports and shipyards** by integrating energy-secure utilities, climate-resilient design standards and modular upgrade options that guarantee operational continuity under adverse conditions.

4) Dual-Use

- + **Facilitate coordinated logistics planning** between commercial and military maritime actors.
- + **Strengthen civil-military cooperation**, notably through dual-use investments. In line with the European Commission's Joint Communication on the European Preparedness Union Strategy² of the 26th of March 2025, the "EU must integrate dual-use considerations into all of its infrastructure investments and capability planning, such as military mobility [...]." The inclusion of the naval dimension within the Military Mobility falls under this requirement.

CONCLUSION

The future of European defence cannot be landlocked. SEA Naval recommends the European Commission and Member States to integrate **naval assets and naval shipbuilding as key pillars of Military Mobility in the Joint Communication on Military Mobility and legislative review and proposals the year as per the Commission's White Paper**. This upgrade will not only increase EU's resilience and preparedness, but it will also ensure its operational effectiveness and strategic depth. In addition, it will support the sustainability, innovation, and competitiveness of a vital European naval shipbuilding sector. These measures align with recently broadened funding channels such as the CEF military-mobility window, and innovation instruments like the EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS) and Horizon Europe, enabling blended financing that combines grants with long-term EU loans (SAFE).³

² <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/b81316ab-a513-49a1-b520-b6a6e0de6986/file.bin>

³ A recent European Court of Auditors Special Report 04/2025 highlights funding gaps and fragmented implementation as key obstacles to Military Mobility, underlining the urgency of integrating naval assets and related infrastructure.

BACKGROUND NOTE

About SEA Naval:

SEA Naval is a permanent working group of SEA Europe representing the interests of the European naval shipyards under the umbrella of SEA Europe. SEA Naval provides a forum for the European Naval industry to discuss matters of common interest to the naval sector. Thereupon, the Group supports European institutions and its Member States with expertise when needed and organises joint participation in EU-funded projects. SEA Naval represents nearly 90% of naval systems integrators and shipyards in Europe.

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