

The Dutch Ministry of Defense is exploring plans to convert decommissioned trains into mobile hospitals capable of transporting and treating wounded soldiers, according to reports in the Netherlands.

The proposal, still in its early stages, reflects growing concerns across Europe about the continent's readiness for a potential large-scale conflict, particularly in light of rising tensions with Russia. Military planners fear that Europe's existing transport infrastructure is ill-prepared to handle rapid troop and equipment movements in the event of war.

A spokesperson for the Dutch national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorweg, confirmed that exploratory talks with the defense ministry have begun. "The process is still in an early stage," said Erik Kroeze, emphasizing that no final decisions have been made.

Civilian Support for Military Operations

The initiative underscores the Netherlands' belief that civilian resources must play a critical role in any future military operation. According to Dutch media, the Ministry of Defense has also discussed the possibility of deploying Dutch train drivers to Eastern Europe to support logistics in the event of a crisis.

Currently, 24 retired trains — with the potential for more — are being considered for conversion into hospital units by 2026. The trains, which were originally slated for sale abroad, are being phased out as the Dutch rail network upgrades to newer models.

A European-Wide Push for Dual-Use Transport

The Netherlands is not alone in considering dual-use transport solutions. The European Commission is expected to unveil a military mobility package later this year, which could

encourage countries to make civilian transport assets available for defense purposes.

The Directorate-General for Defense and Space (DG DEFIS) has already distributed a survey to key players in the European transport sector, asking whether assets such as flatbed rail wagons, dual-use ferries, heavy-duty trucks, and medical rail cars could be scaled up in a crisis.

An EU military mobility update presented to member states in June suggested establishing a “solidarity mechanism” to pool such transport resources across the bloc. The Commission argued that strengthening dual-use transport capabilities — including specialized rail wagons and rolling stock — is essential for Europe’s collective defense preparedness.

If implemented, the Dutch train-hospital proposal would mark one of the most visible examples of Europe’s shift toward integrating civilian infrastructure into military logistics.