



## PRESS RELEASE

### Launching of the *Vlissingen*, second mine countermeasure vessel of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme

The launching ceremony of the *Vlissingen*, second of the twelve mine countermeasure vessels of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme, intended for the Royal Netherlands Navy, took place on October 19<sup>th</sup> 2023 in Concarneau in the presence of the Chiefs of Navy of the Royal Netherlands Navy and the Belgian Navy, and the representative of the Chief of Staff of the French Navy. The launching was carried out by Kership, which builds the ships in Concarneau on behalf of Naval Group, general contractor.

This programme was awarded in 2019 to Belgium Naval & Robotics, the consortium formed by Naval Group and Exail<sup>1</sup>, following an international competition. It provides for the supply to the Belgian Navy and the Royal Netherlands Navy of twelve mine countermeasures vessels and around a hundred drones integrated inside a toolbox that will equip the vessels.

Naval Group, as overall architect and prime contractor, is responsible for the design of the ships, the overall integration, and the testing and commissioning of the mission system (combat system and mine countermeasures system).

Kership, a joint venture between Naval Group and Piriou, is in charge of the production of the twelve vessels which are assembled in Concarneau and Lanester.

Exail, as co-contractor, is in charge of the unmanned drones' system. Most of these drones will be produced in Ostend, Belgium. The maintenance of the ships will be carried out in Belgium in close collaboration between the Belgian Navy and Naval Group Belgium, with the assistance of its partner Flanders Ship Repair.

The *Vlissingen*, second vessel of the program and first one intended for the Royal Netherlands Navy, will be delivered in 2025.

The first vessel, *Oostende*, intended for the Belgian Navy, has been launched on March 29th 2023, while the keel for the third of the twelve vessels, the *M941 Tournai*, also intended for the Belgian Navy, was laid. The keel of the fourth vessel, the *Scheveningen*, second vessel intended for the Royal Netherlands

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<sup>1</sup> Exail, is the new name of the alliance between ECA Group and iXblue who joined forces around a shared brand: Exail. Learn more at: <https://www.ecagroup.com/en/corporate/eca-group-and-ixblue-join-forces-and-become-exail>

Navy, was laid on July 19<sup>th</sup> 2023.

The delivery of the *Oostende* is scheduled for the end of 2024 in Zeebrugge, Belgium. Deliveries of the other vessels will then be staggered until 2030.

Pierre Eric Pommellet, CEO of Naval Group said: « This ship is once again the symbol of great industrial cooperation, but also that of great European cooperation. The Vlissingen is now launched less than 53 months after the contract came into force. This success is the fruit of the cooperative work of the engineering teams of Naval Group, the production teams of Kership and the Piriou shipyard, and the teams of the Belgian and Dutch administrations whom I would like to congratulate. »

## **A unique industrial and European partnership**

The rMCM programme is also a major element of European Defence. This programme demonstrates that European countries can work together to define their needs and share a solution that is destined to become a reference in the mine countermeasures field, not only for the Belgian and Dutch navies, but also for other navies in Europe and around the world.

In September 2023, a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MoU) was signed between France, Belgium and the Netherlands. It allows France to use the rMCM vessels design to equip the French Navy. 12+6 vessels should be delivered under these programs. Thales, which since 2015 has been developing the Franco-British MMCM unmanned mine countermeasures programme, currently being tested at sea by the two Navies, will be in charge of the embedded drone solution for France. This partnership further solidifies the cooperation of these three countries in the field of mine warfare.

## **A resilient vessel and a latest generation toolbox**

These specialised and cyber secured by design mine countermeasures (MCM) vessels are the first to have the capability to embark and launch a combination of surface drones (themselves 12-metre, 18-tonne vessels), underwater drones and aerial drones. The mine countermeasures vessels will use a mainly autonomous system for detection, classification and neutralisation of mines. They can withstand underwater explosions and have very low acoustic, electrical and magnetic signatures, in line with the missions to be carried out.

These mine countermeasure vessels have the following characteristics:

- Length: 82,6m
- Width: 17m
- Displacement: 2800t
- Maximum speed: 15,3 knots
- Range: >3500 nautical miles
- Crew: 63 people (base crew 33 people)
- Drone capabilities: Exail UMISOFT System, 2 unmanned surface vehicles (Exail Inspector 125), 3 autonomous underwater vehicles (A-18 equipped with Exail UMISAS 120 sonar), 2 towed sonars (T-18 equipped with Exail UMISAS 240 sonar), 2 Mine Identification & Disposal Systems (MIDS) systems (Exail Seascan and K-Ster C), 2 unmanned aerial vessel (UMS Skeldar's V200), 1 Exail influence mine sweeping system integrating 5 CTM magnetic modules et 1 PATRIA acoustic module.
- Embarkation capacity: 2 SOLAS rigid hull inflatable boats of 7m.
- Handling: 2 side launch & recovery systems for surface drones or commando boats, a 15t dedicated rear crane and a 3t overhead crane.

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#### BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS

BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS is the name of the Naval Group - Exail consortium formed to respond to the Belgian-Dutch tender for the replacement and initial support of the mine countermeasures capability.

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