



PRESS RELEASE

Naval Group launches the first mine countermeasure vessel of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme and lays the keel for the third one

On 29 March 2023, the first of the twelve mine countermeasure vessels of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme, the *M940 Oostende* intended for the Belgian Navy, was floated out in Concarneau. The launching ceremony took place in the presence of Ludivine Dedonder, Belgian Minister of Defence, Kajsja Ollongren, Dutch Minister of Defence, and Patricia Mirallès, French Secretary of State for Veterans and Memory. During this day, Naval Group also laid the keel for the third of the twelve vessels, the *M941 Tournai*, intended for the Belgian Navy.

This programme was awarded in 2019 to Belgium Naval & Robotics, the consortium formed by Naval Group and Exail¹, 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.

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

Pierre Eric Pommellet, CEO of Naval Group said: *"I am very pleased to be present here in Concarneau at our Piriou partner shipyard, alongside Exail, to celebrate the progress of this unique programme which is the story of a shared vision for the future of mine warfare and European naval defence. We are working together to develop this game-changing defence solution that will serve Belgian and Dutch sovereignty and prepare the future of mine countermeasures in the naval domain."*

Ludivine Dedonder, Belgian Minister of defence stated: *"In a world in full swing due to geopolitical upheavals, our cooperation is all the more strategic. The operational concept developed by the Belgian and Dutch navies is a world first and revolutionary in several ways. This project, whose first ship is launching today, shows that cooperation, solidarity and innovation are key values for our common security. With this renewal programme for our mine countermeasure capabilities, we can be proud of our*

¹ 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>

contribution to defence innovation, to face the security challenges of our time together.

A unique industrial and European partnership

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 Robotics, as co-contractor, is in charge of the unmanned drones' system. Most of these drones will be produced in Exailfactory (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 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.

Lieutenant commander (1LV) Renauld Hock, head of the binational programme: *"Today, we celebrate both the launch of the M940 Oostende, first ship of the City Class, and the keel laying of the M941 Tournai, third of the city class and second Belgian vessel. These were two important milestones in our binational rMCM programme.*

From now on, it is an all hands on deck approach, a new ship will be launched approximately every six months, the first Dutch vessel being scheduled for this autumn. The building of platforms number 3 and 4 has also begun.

Moreover, this year we plan the setting-to-work of the first vessel and the tests of the toolbox, the toolbox being essential to this new rMCM capacity.

Belgium and the Netherlands are convinced that the City Class is the best way forward in Naval Mine Warfare: true system-of-unmanned-systems which will pave the way for all modern navies."

Belgium, an industrial center of excellence for Naval Group and Exail in mine countermeasures

Within the framework of this strategic partnership, Naval Group and Exail are developing their presence in Belgium through dedicated structures, Naval Group Belgium and Exail Belgium. Belgian industry's added value is maximized through the rMCM programme, starting from the design, development and operational support phases, notably through procurement and subcontracting operations with Belgian companies on critical ship equipment. As an example, Exail Belgium will develop, produce, assemble and qualify the toolbox in Belgium.

The involvement of the Belgian industry in the programme also concerns R&D projects carried out in Belgium to prepare the future of mine countermeasures. On April 28th 2022, Naval Group inaugurated the MCM Lab and the Cyber Lab, two collaborative R&D laboratories created within its subsidiary Naval Group Belgium. The Labs bring together Belgian institutional, industrial and academic partners to develop tomorrow's innovations in the field of mine countermeasures and cyber security.

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.

The solution acquired by the Belgian and Dutch navies is a complete paradigm shift in the way mines are fought by adopting a remote position (stand-off) which reduces the risk for personnel and the mothership and allows a substantial increase in the speed of coverage of mined areas.

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)
- Combat System: Naval Group Polaris system
- 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), 1 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.

FOLLOW US



Website:

<https://www.belgium-naval-and-robotics.be>

Social networks



BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS

BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS is the name of the Naval Group- Exail Robotics consortium as a part of the response to the Belgian-Dutch consultation for the replacement and initial support of their mine warfare capability.

BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS
38 – 40 Square de Meeûs, B-1000 Brussels
contact@belgium-naval-and-robotics.be

Contacts

Naval Group

Véronique Page

Mob. +33 (0)6 37 18 01 32

veronique.page@naval-group.com

Faïza Zaroual

Mob. +33 (0)6 31 65 78 25

faiza.zaroual@naval-group.com

Exail

Marion Seyve

Tel. +33 (0)1 30 08 88 88

marion.seyve@exail.com