



Press release

Delivery of the Vlissingen, the second mine countermeasure vessel of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme

The Vlissingen, second mine countermeasure vessel of the rMCM programme and first one for the Royal Netherlands Navy, was delivered on 27th February 2026 in Den Helder. This event, held in the presence of Vice Admiral Jan Willem Hartman, Commander of the Materiel and IT Command, Navy Captain Ludo Portier, Head of Procurement Naval Systems, Navy Captain Kurt De Winter Director of Operations Belgian Navy, Vincent Martinot-Lagarde, Naval Group surface ships Executive Vice President, and Steven Luys, CEO Exail Robotics Belgium, represents a major milestone in European defence cooperation.

"This is a highly symbolic and huge step in the pursue of a strong and trustful relationship between our nations. But it also tightens our bond and allows the Netherlands to benefit from an innovative and performative ship, who will deeply reinforce the naval power of their Navy. It is also a world premiere, as Belgium delivers for the first time a vessel for another nation, an ally." Vincent Martinot-Lagarde, Naval Group surface ships Executive Vice President.

"With the transfer and arrival of HNLMS VLISSINGEN, Belgium and the Netherlands take a historic and exceptional step within their binational programme. For the first time within our BeNeSam cooperation framework, a Royal Netherlands Navy vessel has been built under contract by the Belgian Minister of Defence — a milestone in which Belgium, acting as lead nation, helps deliver a naval ship for another country. This achievement reflects an exceptional depth of mutual trust and the maturity of our joint capability development. This transfer elevates our cooperation to a new strategic level." Captain (Navy) Ludo Portier, Section Head Procurement Naval Systems (DGMR)

"With the delivery of Vlissingen, Exail continues its contribution to the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme, in close cooperation with Naval Group and industrial partners. This milestone reflects our recognized expertise in autonomous mine countermeasure systems and our commitment to supporting the Royal Netherlands Navy with advanced, fully integrated unmanned capabilities. Together, we are contributing to strengthening NATO's maritime security and European operational readiness." Jérôme Bendell, Director of the Exail Maritime Business Line.

A resilient vessel and a state-of-the-art toolbox

The solution acquired by the Royal Netherlands Navy represents a complete paradigm shift in mine countermeasures, with the ship and its crew remaining at a safe distance from danger (stand-off). This solution increases the speed of mine clearance tenfold compared to conventional methods.

These ships, specialized in mine warfare, are the first to have the capacity to carry, launch or fly and reconfigure a set of surface drones (ships measuring around 12 meters and weighing 19 tonnes), underwater drones and aerial drones. They are the first to implement a fully robotic system for the detection, classification, identification 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.

Technical specifications

- Length: 82.6 m overall
- Beam: 17 m overall
- Displacement: 2,800 tonnes
- Maximum speed: 15.3 knots
- Range: >3,500 nautical miles
- Accommodation: 63 people
- Drone capabilities: UMISOFT Exail system, 2 surface drones (Inspector 125 Exail), 3 autonomous underwater vehicles (A-18 equipped with UMISAS 120 Exail sonar), 2 towed sonars planned (T-18 equipped with UMISAS 240 Exail sonar), 2 mine identification and destruction systems (Seascan and K-Ster C Exail), 2 aerial drones (V200 Saab Skeldar), 1 Exail influence dredger planned incorporating 5 CTM magnetic modules and 1 PATRIA acoustic module.
- Embarkation capacity: 2 x 7m SOLAS RHIB boats.
- Handling: 2 x side gantries with floating cradle for 19t surface drones and commando boats, 1 rear crane with a capacity of 15 tonnes, overhead crane with a capacity of 3 tonnes

An innovative model for European defence cooperation

Awarded in 2019 to Belgium Naval & Robotics, the consortium formed by Naval Group and Exail, the rMCM programme is a major component of European defence cooperation. A tripartite agreement between France, Belgium, and the Netherlands was signed in September 2023 to formalize their cooperation in the field of mine warfare.

Naval Group is responsible for the design of the vessels. Exail designs and delivers the naval drones. The overall integration, testing and commissioning of the mission system will be carried out in close collaboration with Exail, ensuring full operational coherences between the vessels and the unmanned capabilities. The vessels are being built and assembled by Piriou, under the industrial project management of Kership, a joint venture between Naval Group and Piriou.

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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