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PRESS RELEASE

First sea trials of the *Vlissingen*, first mine countermeasure vessel for the Dutch Navy

The *Vlissingen*, the second of the series of mine countermeasures vessels of the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme, first intended for the Royal Netherlands Navy, began her first sea trials campaign from Concarneau, France, on March 27th 2025. The aim is to implement and test at sea the vessel's performance before its delivery at the end of 2025. The rMCM programme is being led by Belgium Naval & Robotics, a consortium formed by Naval Group and Exail, involving Kership (a joint venture between Piriou and Naval Group) as industrial prime contractor.

During this first day at sea, the ship's performance has been put to the test, in particular her propulsion system and manoeuvrability. Several sea trials campaigns will then follow to test all the systems, before her delivery at the end of 2025.

Eight ships under construction

The first vessel, *Oostende*, intended for the Belgian Navy is currently undergoing trials of her combat system in Naval Group Lorient shipyard. It will be delivered during the summer 2025. The first sea trials of the *Tournai*, third vessel of the program and second unit intended for the Belgian Navy, are planned for the end of the summer 2025. The fourth vessel, the *Scheveningen*, second vessel intended for the Royal Netherlands Navy, was launched on November 2024. All twelve vessels ordered in the frame of the rMCM program will be delivered before end of 2030.

A unique industrial and European partnership

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. Naval Group is responsible for ship design, overall mission systems integration, testing and commissioning. The ships are built and assembled by Kership and Chantier Piriou, under the overall industrial management of Kership, a joint venture between Naval Group and Piriou. Exail is in charge of the drones mission system. Most of these drones will be produced and maintained in Exail Belgium subsidiary based in Ostend.

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, 19-tonne vessels), underwater drones and aerial drones. The mine countermeasures vessels will use a mainly autonomous system for detection, classification, identification and neutralisation of mines This approach with an unmanned integrated system enables safe and rapid clearance of mined areas—up to ten times faster than traditional methods.
The MCM vessels 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 Software suite, 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 vessels (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

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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