Zeebrugge, November 4th, 2025

BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS

Press release

First mooring of the Oostende in Zeebrugge, the first mine countermeasures vessel in the Belgian-Dutch rMCM programme

The mooring of the M940 Oostende, the first in a series of mine countermeasure vessels for the Belgian Navy under the replacement Mine CounterMeasure programme (rMCM), took place on 3 November 2025 in Zeebrugge in the presence of Theo Francken, Belgian Minister of Defence, General Aviator Frederik Vansina, Chief of Staff of the Belgian Armed Forces, Pierre Eric Pommellet, Chairman and CEO of Naval Group, and Jérôme Bendell, Director of the Exail Maritime Division.

"The arrival in Zeebrugge of the Oostende, the first mine countermeasures vessel in the rMCM programme, the result of joint efforts by Naval Group and its partners Exail, Kership, Piriou, and all our Belgian partners and suppliers involved in the programme, is a major milestone for European defence cooperation. This innovative drone-based solution will help strengthen the naval power of the Belgian and Dutch navies, thanks to its resilience capabilities already demonstrated during sea trials."

Pierre Éric Pommellet, Chairman and CEO of Naval Group

"Exail is proud to deliver, alongside Naval Group, this new drone-based mine warfare capability to Belgium and the Netherlands. The result of our investments in Belgium, where all our drones are produced, this programme embodies exemplary European cooperation between industry, navies and national authorities. With its expertise in the entire drone system — from navigation technologies to complete command and control systems — Exail is contributing, within this European cooperation, to providing Belgium and the Netherlands with cutting-edge technological capabilities that will set the standard within NATO and strengthen European sovereignty."

Jérôme Bendell, Director of the Exail Maritime Division.

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. Including a 20-year industrial cooperation and know-how transfer plan to Belgium to develop and sustain the Belgian BITD, it involves numerous Belgian suppliers and partners who will contribute to the programme (construction and integration, research and development (R&D), maintenance).

Naval Group is responsible for the design of the vessels. The overall integration, testing and commissioning of the mission system will be carried out in close collaboration with Exail. The vessels are being built and assembled by Piriou, under the industrial project management of Kership, a joint venture between Naval Group and Piriou. Exail is in charge of the UxV mission system, and the UxVs are produced (with the exception of the UAV) and maintained in Belgium by Exail Robotics Belgium, Exail's Belgian subsidiary.

Nine ships currently under construction

Following the mooring of the Oostende, nine of the eleven remaining ships in the series are currently under construction, at various stages of completion. Five of them are already in the water. The second in the series, the Vlissingen, intended for the Royal Netherlands Navy, began sea trials in the summer of 2025. The third, the Tournai, destined for the Belgian Navy, will begin sea trials in November. The Delfzijl, the tenth in the series, began construction at the end of October. Deliveries will continue until the end of 2030.

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

The solution acquired by the Belgian and Dutch navies 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, specialised in mine warfare, will be the first to have the capacity to carry, launch or fly and reconfigure a set of surface drones (ships measuring around 12 metres 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 (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 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.

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.

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

Contacts

Naval Group
Bénédicte Mano
Mob. +33 (0)6 76 46 17 77
benedicte.mano@naval-group.com

Exail
Gwenaëlle Allaire
Tel. +33 (0)1 30 08 88 88
gwenaelle.allaire@exail.com