



BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS

PRESS RELEASE

ECA GROUP WILL BUILD ITS PLANT IN OSTEND TO MANUFACTURE THE NAVAL DRONES FOR MINE CLEARANCE

ECA Group, an expert in robotics, automated systems, simulation and industrial processes, will build its new plant in the port of Ostend in order to carry out the contract to supply their unmanned systems for the 12 minesweepers of the Belgian and Dutch navies.

In 2019, the Dutch and Belgian navies decided to award the supply of 12 minesweepers (6 for each country) and the dedicated unmanned systems for mine clearance at sea to the consortium Belgium Naval & Robotics, set up by Naval Group and ECA Group. Many Belgian companies are involved in this nearly 2 billion contract as partner and supplier. Subsidiaries have been created in Belgium by the two companies to facilitate these exchanges.

The company ECA Robotics Belgium, the Belgian subsidiary of ECA Group, will manufacture the next generation of naval drones for this contract but also for future export sales, at its plant in Ostend. It concerns disruptive technologies that are the core of the innovative 'stand-off' mine hunting concept that Belgium Naval & Robotics proposes to the 2 navies, both world leaders in the field of mine counter measures: The mother ship and therefore its crew, stay away from the danger zone. The unmanned systems clear the mines autonomously and are controlled from the mother ship.

These unmanned systems will be manufactured in a new factory to be built in Ostend. PORT OSTEND grants ECA Group a concession for the building of the factory on the former site of Beliard in the port area. The plant with a surface of 5000 m² will be built on this location and will be operational in 2022.

The investment for the construction of the factory and the start of production represents around 10M €. All the naval drones (submarines and surface) of ECA group to be delivered to the Belgian and Dutch navies will be produced in this factory: the submarine drone (AUV) A18-M, the towed sonar T18-M, the surface drone (USV) INSPECTOR 125 and the mine inspection and neutralization drones (ROV MIDS) Seascan and K-STER and launch & recovery systems drone-drone as well as surface equipment.

"In parallel with the construction of our plant, ECA Group is looking for various profiles (including engineers) for the two Belgian sites of its subsidiary ECA Robotics Belgium: Hainaut in Wallonia where the design office and the headquarters will be established, and Ostend in Flanders to support plant operations. We are mainly looking for technical staff and workers for our site in Ostend. The plant is expected to employ over 70 staff in 2-3 years' time." explains Steven Luys, general manager of ECA Robotics Belgium.

Since its establishment in 1936, ECA Group has been a leader in the field of innovation and develops innovative technological solutions for the detection and clearance of mines. To date, over 30 navies worldwide use these solutions to make waterways safer. *"We are pleased to build our factory in the Port of Ostend, near the navy and with direct access to the North Sea."* states Steven Luys.

"ECA Group choses the port of Ostend for various reasons", explains Charlotte Verkeyn, chair of the administrative board of the Port of Ostend. *"The activities of the group are perfectly in line with our expansion vision in various markets. We are strengthening our economic and social system. The second reason is that they can find everything they need in Ostend: the premises, the quays, an easily accessible site and a network of companies."*

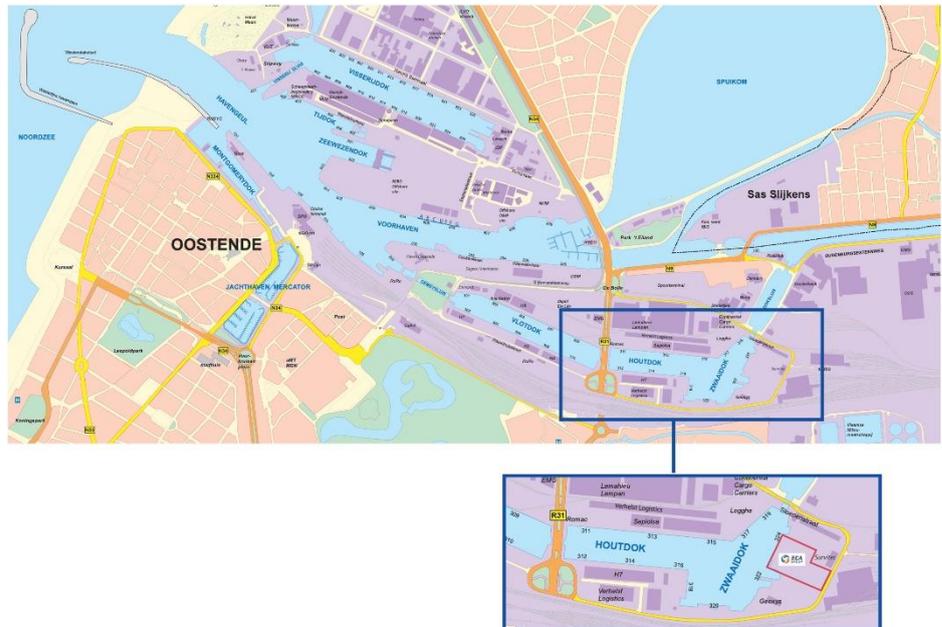
"The entire team is working hard on this project since the beginning of last year. This contract proves that we can fulfil our mission: the port as a driver of sustainable employment. ECA Group is looking to recruit over 70 interesting profiles, which makes our region attractive to the workforce." explains Dirk Declerck, CEO of the Port of Ostend.

Bart Tommelein, mayor of the city of Ostend: *"Thanks to this new activity, Ostend proves to be an international knowledge centre. Maritime Innovation is one of our fundamental cornerstones. The presence of ECA Group will accelerate research and development in our port area. I thank them for their confidence and guarantee the full cooperation of the port and the city of Ostend in order to ensure the smooth running of the company."*



From left to right: Bart Tommelein (Mayor of the city of Ostend), Noël LeFloch (Business Development Director of ECA Robotics Belgium), Steven Luys (General Manager of ECA Robotics Belgium), François Falcou (Managing Director of ECA Robotics), Dirk Declerck (CEO of the Port of Ostend) et Charlotte Verkeyn (Chair of the administrative board of the Port of Ostend)





PORT OSTEND

Port of Ostend focuses on continuity, growth and employment in five sectors: the blue economy, bulk and project cargo, cruise ships and ferries, circular economy and the fishing sector. These sectors are expanded even further based on two principles: give priority to safety, health and environment, and secondly, support innovation and development.

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BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS

BELGIUM NAVAL & ROBOTICS is the name of the Naval Group – ECA Group consortium set up to meet the Belgian-Dutch tender for the replacement and initial support of the mine warfare capability.

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