



**Press
release**



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Belgian and Royal Netherlands Navies prepare to receive robotic autonomous systems in third-generation Mine Countermeasures programme

Toulon, France – 20/10/2022 – In 2019, the Belgian and Royal Netherlands navies awarded a contract to the Belgium Naval & Robotics consortium, made up of ECA Group (now Exail) and Naval Group, to supply twelve vessels and around a hundred tools dedicated to stand-off mine countermeasures (MCM) at sea. Exail's stand-off MCM solution, also known as replacement MCM, keeps the vessel and crew away from danger by sending drones (tools) to perform MCM missions.

Since May 2019, Exail has successfully completed a series of milestones in the design phase up to the Critical Design Review validating systems design and confirming compliance with customer requirements. The next milestone is the Test Readiness Review of the Toolbox planned at the end of 2022, to ensure that when the drone systems are delivered in 2024, they will be operational, compliant with the requirements and that operators and crews will be trained and documented to make optimum use of them.

Upcoming sea trials in presence of Belgium Navy crews

The customer is involved at each stage of the qualification process of the tools and their Launch & Recovery Systems (LARS). Sea trials of prototype vehicles will take place in the next three months to test the new functionalities of the A18-M Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV). Prototypes of the LARS and the Inspector 125 Unmanned Surface Vessel (USV) are currently undergoing sea trials to test all the required functionalities and to improve their operation.

Upstream prototyping – leaving nothing to chance

Given the dimension of this programme and the expectations regarding its deliverables, Exail is manufacturing prototypes of each robotic autonomous system composing the Toolbox to verify the functionality and performance of the systems and to prepare for system qualification and acceptance by the customer, while respecting the overall schedule.

The prototypes include:

- The Inspector USV 125, which has already been sailing for a year and has been used to develop the MCM Platform LARS system with Naval Group, A18 and T18 LARS systems and to work on the integration of new sensors including the FLS 5 Mine and Obstacle Avoidance Sonar (MOAS);
- The A18-M AUV for mine detection, including the UMISAS 120 Synthetic Aperture Sonar (SAS).
- T18, the towed sonar based on the A18-M and its UMISAS 240 SAS.
- SEASCAN MK2 and K-STER C Mine Identification and Disposal Systems (MIDS) equipped with new high definition cameras and forward-looking sonar allowing an automatic mission including transit, target relocation, hover and target destruction.
- A Containerized Command and Control Centre (C2), equipped with the MWS (Mine Warfare System) including the UMISOFT™ suite composed of a Toolbox Mission Management software for planning and evaluation, Drone Control software dedicated to each Tool and Data Management software for data analysis and contact database management.

Ongoing collaboration with customer navies

In parallel, as part of the Operational Testing & Evaluation (OT&E) Programme of the Royal Netherlands Navy, Exail has provided a number of tools, including the MIDS and the A18-M AUV with its platform launch and recovery cage. The OT&E programme enables the Royal Netherlands Navy to prepare and test new operational doctrines for the drones as early as possible in the pre-delivery phase.

As part of the OT&E, the Royal Netherlands Navy's teams will evaluate the performance of the rMCM tools, the operation of the LARS and the associated UMISOFT™ software suite. They will also be able to prepare the subjects of task allocation, maintenance and training.

Objectives are two-fold: firstly, to enable the Royal Netherlands Navy to produce the necessary operational documentation, and secondly, to provide feedback from the crews operating them, based on their use experiences of the systems in real conditions. Exail's aim is to supply the navies with an improved and fully operational toolbox thanks to customer feedback.

Background:

In 2019, the Belgian and Royal Netherlands navies awarded the Belgium Naval & Robotics (BNR) consortium, made up of Naval Group and ECA Group, now Exail, the contract to supply 12 vessels, 6 for each country, and around 100 drones dedicated to stand-off MCM at sea. Delivery of operational systems will begin at the end of 2024. The two navies, who already lead the way in the field of mine countermeasures, were seeking to replace their MCM capability. They chose BNR's solution, which offers a new approach as the first operational stand-off MCM system to be based on a fully integrated toolbox of drones, with the UMISOFT™ suite, a complete mission management, data management and tool control software.

About Exail

Exail is a leading high-tech industrial company specializing in cutting-edge robotics, maritime, navigation, aerospace and photonics technologies. With a strong entrepreneurial culture, Exail delivers unrivaled performance, reliability and safety to its civil and defense clients operating in severe environments. From the deep sea to outer space, Exail expands their capabilities with a full range of robust in-house manufactured components, products and systems.

Employing a workforce of 1500 people worldwide, the company benefits from a global footprint and conducts its business in over 80 countries.

Exail was formed by ECA Group and iXblue joining forces in 2022. It is a subsidiary of Groupe Gorgé, a family-owned company specialized in high-technology.

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