**SAFEGUARDING OUR LIFELINES, SECURING OUR SOCIETY**

**Invitation to a symposium and life demonstrations at sea**

**Mediterranean Sea, 16 June 2020:** A Belgian frigate and two mine hunters tower high above the blue water. After terrorist groups threatened with attacks against tanker ships, the EU decided to deploy a maritime task force to scan the area around the Suez Canal for explosives.

The sea is calm and people stroll along the waterfront. But suddenly, a huge blast sets the sea ablaze. A liquid natural gas tanker that readied to exit the Suez Canal, on its way to Zeebrugge, is literally blown apart.

Within a few minutes, stock markets in Europe nosedive and energy prices skyrocket. How could this happen, even after the area was declared safe?

Patrolling close to shore, the frigate spots a suspicious motorboat speeding away in the direction of Port Said. Instantly, a helicopter takes off to stop the boat, while a special team prepares to board it.

Almost at the same time, the message arrives that an unidentified freighter has been observed dropping several objects in the water while leaving the port. Immediately both minehunters are tasked to localize and investigate the objects, while the frigate prepares a second boarding team to intercept and inspect the cargo vessel.

Science fiction? Luckily, yes, at least for the time being. But can we take for granted that this will remain the case? Last year, ISIS made it clear that it will try to attack merchant ships that navigate between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. It certainly has the knowhow and with so many small fishery boats in the area, it is easy to equip them unnoticed. In other words: if the intention is there and our intelligence would fail, nobody can guarantee that this will never happen.

Our ports are separated from those in Eastern Asia by 10,000 miles of instability. The failure to secure this corridor, we are convinced, could damage our national economy, the European economy, and our security in general.

The Belgian Navy wants to provide you, as an important stakeholder, with the opportunity to become more familiar with the maritime challenges and the kind of capabilities that are needed to tackle them. **We therefore gladly invite you to attend - our symposium to learn more about the role of the Navy.**

Like any enterprise that has to demonstrate its qualities to its customers, the Navy is convinced that, we need to reach out to the public and try to explain our role and added value to the best possible extent. This is why we make an appeal to you, as a privileged representative of the 11 million citizens that we work for, as their politicians, academics, journalists, military and corporate leaders – in the hope that you will help us to provide in their security.

**Venue: Provinciaal Hof, Markt 3, Bruges**

**Programme of the symposium:** We will start with a high-level symposium in Bruges on 16 June, where we will discuss the options for smaller navies, like ours, to defend the interests of their nations and international partnerships more effectively. The agenda of that symposium looks as follows:

. 16h00: Registration, coffee/tea

. 17h00: Welcome and opening

Keynote Speech Prof. Eric Grove, British naval historian and defense analyst

Panel Debate Ambassador François de Kerchove d’Exaerde, Belgian Permanent Representative to NATO (BELOTAN)

Amiral du Ché, French Navy, Policy&Strategy

General de Rousiers, Chairman of the EU Military Committee

CEO DEME, Belgian Shipping Industry

Moderated by Prof. Jonathan Holslag  
Closing Address Mr Steven Vandeput, Minister of Defence

Closing Remarks

. 19h00: Reception