



Hamina-class
missile boat PGG
Tornio.

Commander of the Finnish Navy Jori Harju:

The Baltic Sea's strategic significance has increased

Security in the Baltic Sea region has deteriorated in recent years. More operators have entered the region, making it even more important to safeguard Finland's sea lines of communication. The Finnish Navy is responding to these challenges with new acquisitions and closer cooperation with Sweden.

Rear Admiral **Jori Harju**, Commander of the Finnish Navy, points out the ever-increasing military and economic activities that are impacting security in the Baltic Sea.

"Shipping is vital to Finland, as it cannot be replaced by other modes of transport. Without functional sea transport, our welfare and social order would quickly fall under threat. That is why all Finns need to work together to ensure security of supply," he says.

The sea itself has, of course, remained the same. Yet there are currently many new operators in the Baltic Sea who are following the security situation in Northern Europe extremely closely.

"The Baltic Sea has always been a strategic region for Russia, and it is also becoming increasingly important for NATO. By new countries and operators, I mean not only military but also commercial projects that have increased various parties' economic interests in the area," says Harju.

Many cables and gas pipelines have been laid in the Baltic Sea. Traffic volumes are rising, wind-

farms have been built, and even tunnel connections are being planned. With all these changes going on, the authorities have more than enough supervisory tasks to attend to.

The Finnish Navy's main tasks remain unchanged under these new circumstances: safeguarding territorial integrity, crisis management, rapid response preparedness, inter-authority cooperation, and security of supply.

Procurement looking shipshape

Squadron 2020 – the Navy's largest acquisition of vessels and weapon systems in a long time – is progressing on schedule. Agreements worth approximately EUR 1.3 billion were signed with several parties in autumn 2019.

"Construction of the first Pohjanmaa-class vessel will begin at RMC's shipyard in 2022, with the entire series entering service in 2028," says the Rear Admiral.

Until then, the Finnish Defence Forces Logistics Command will continue designing the vessels and the Rauma Marine Construction shipyard will





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prepare to start construction. Other major partners include the propulsion system suppliers Aker Arctic Technology Oy and the Swedish company Saab.

“Thanks to the Pohjanmaa-class vessels, Finland will have four modern multipurpose corvettes that can operate in all conditions – something that no one else has. This is a strategic Finnish acquisition aimed at safeguarding everyone’s security,” says Rear Admiral Harju.

The corvettes will have an estimated lifespan of 30–35 years, and during this time the vessels will safeguard Finland’s aforementioned vital sea lines of communication. In addition to new vessels, the Navy has also begun to acquire battle systems. The Navy’s main partner in this, Saab, has already supplied Finland with torpedoes. The Navy has also been acquiring Gabriel anti-ship missiles from Israel, ESSM surface-to-air missiles from the USA, and new kinds of naval mines.

The torpedoes will be installed not only in the Pohjanmaa-class corvettes, but also in the Hamina-class fast attack crafts that are currently being refitted. These brand-new, fast torpedoes are excellent for both anti-submarine warfare and in coastal defence.

“Both our missile and torpedo acquisitions have progressed according to schedule. We have already had the first test firings of the torpedo system and we are very satisfied with the outcome,” says Harju.

Closer cooperation with Sweden

As the Rear Admiral has previously said, no country in the modern world can succeed by turning in on itself. Cooperation is vital, but military collaboration is different to allying with another country.

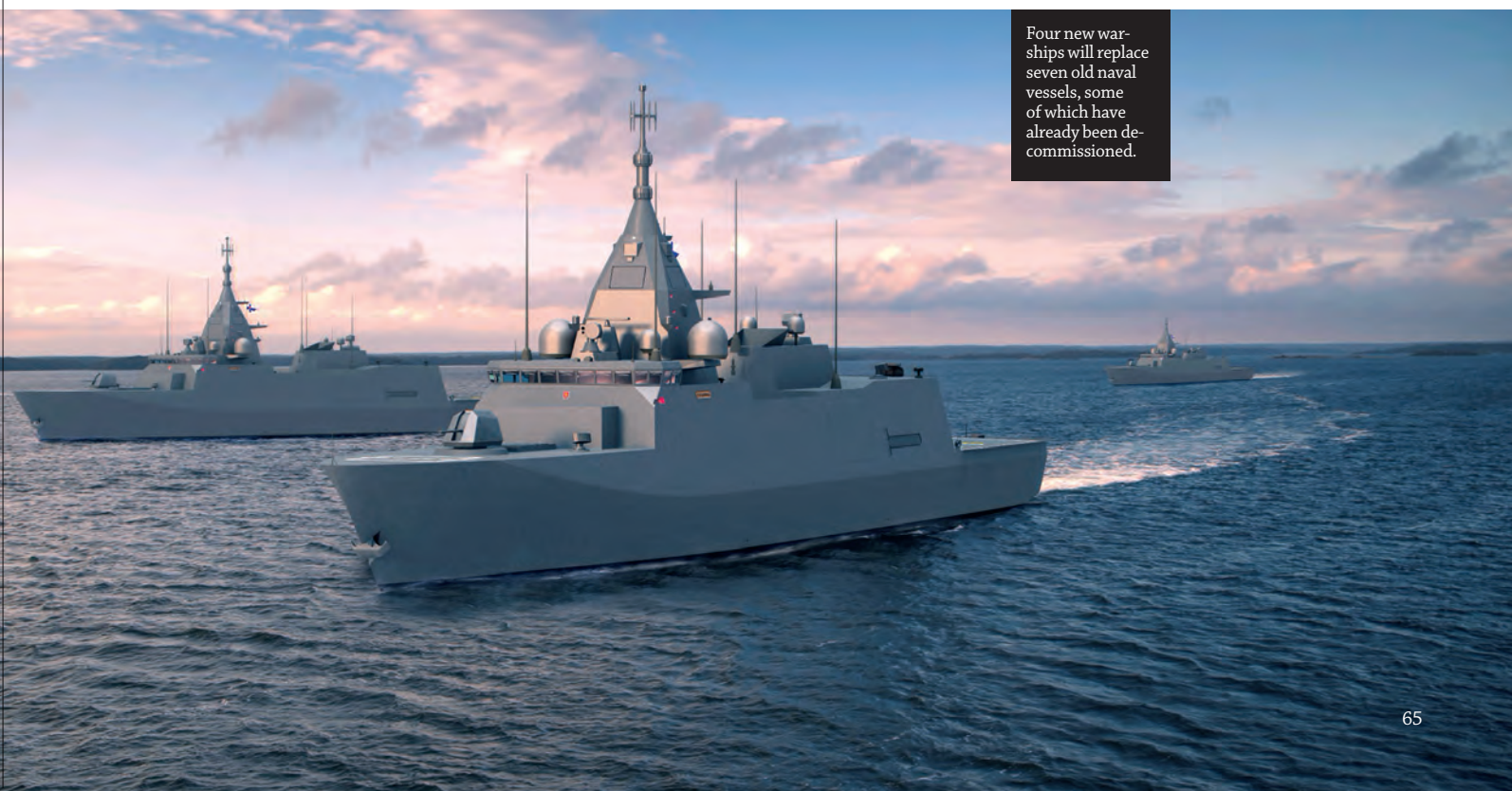
Finland and Sweden have already been deepening their naval cooperation for decades. At the end of February, the countries’ naval navy commanders signed a long-term cooperation plan that will strengthen both countries’ defence and support the security of the maritime operating environment.

“Our goal is to develop all aspects of warfare together. In practice, this means a shared recognized maritime picture, surveillance and operational activities. That is, ensuring that both navies are able to work together,” says Harju.

It is vital to harmonize command and control systems and communication channels. This was tested for the first time in March when the Swedish Navy’s HMS Helsingborg sailed under Finnish command.

“It was a good exercise that demonstrated the compatibility of our command and control systems and communication devices, that is, that we don’t need to lead military exercises using mobile phones. We intend to continue running similar operations.”

According to Rear Admiral Jori Harju, the Finnish Navy will take part in the Swedish Defence Forces’ main exercise in the early summer. ✕



Four new warships will replace seven old naval vessels, some of which have already been decommissioned.