"Looking ahead, we need to expand our partnerships with countries in our neighbourhood and also beyond it. Partnerships make NATO stronger."

The new Partnership Policy agreed at the 2011 Berlin Summit was seen by partners as an important step towards a more nuanced approach. AC/135 continues to place great emphasis on encouraging wider adoption of the NCS and developing the ability of partner countries to maintain and operate a full range of codification services.

On November 15, Peru became the 65th official user of the NATO Codification System (NCS), with the signature of an agreement with AC/135. This took place during the AC/135 meeting held in Marrakech (Morocco) on 13-15 November. The agreement was signed by Major General Juan Carlos Castro Malarin and by Mr George Bond, Chairman of AC/135. The membership of AC/135 now includes 28 NATO nations and 37 non-NATO nations – more member nations than any other Allied Committee in NATO. This evidences the significant benefits of the NATO Codification System (NCS) and its recognition as the worldwide standard for item identification. The Main Group meeting in Marrakech was also significant in that this was only the second AC/135 meeting held in a non-NATO nation. It was hosted by the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and the National Codification Bureau of Morocco and was attended by 68 delegates from 38 countries and representatives from the NATO Support Agency (NSPA).

AC/135 commissioned a Benefits Study this year in order to update the Codification Business Case. Previous similar studies are now out of date and many NCBs need to present a business case to support resource allocations (or to justify existing funding) in times of reducing budgets. This study, undertaken by the LSC Group in the UK, has provided an analytical review of the need for codification, supported by specific examples of cost and efficiency benefits from a number of nations showing how codification adds substantial value to any logistics system. In conjunction with its next Main Group meeting, AC/135 will be organizing a one-day workshop with volunteer countries to analyse the Benefits Study. This is a continuing initiative that requires awareness of emerging situations such as the logistical challenges of withdrawing from Afghanistan.

Some 420,000 new NSNs have been added to the NATO Master Catalogue of References for Logistics (NMCRL), which now totals approximately 17.5 million NATO Stock Numbers (NSNs), 34 million manufacturer part numbers and specifications, and 2.5 million registered suppliers and other organizations. A new feature of the NMCRL is the choice between basic and advanced modes for querying information. The basic mode is designed to make the product easier to use for those lacking specialist knowledge of codification.

AC/135 has continued to improve and develop contacts with industry and has been actively marketing its products by attending conferences and exhibitions. A key focus is the development of civil item identification standards that are compatible with military data requirements. The NATO Industry Day in Riga, in particular, provided a unique opportunity to better understand NATO's transformational goals and anticipate its future capability requirements. (Photo: Chairman, AC/135 with NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Defence Investment and Deputy Chairman of CNAD Ernest J. Herold, at the NATO Industry Day in Riga).

The Supplier Sourced Codification (SSC) project aims to enable any codification tool to collect item characteristics data directly from manufacturers’ electronic data repositories in order to automate as much as possible of the codification process. Led by the UK in cooperation with defence industry partners, the SSC project has demonstrated the potential for very significant cost savings in the codification process and substantial improvements to the quality of codification data. Under UK leadership, work is continuing to refine the processes and to demonstrate that these new techniques offer mutual benefits for defence and industry. The SSC project also represents an opportunity to contribute the NATO Connected Forces Initiative, which promotes joint development of capabilities. The former SSC project leader Mr Ian Smith having now left the UK NCB, a new SSC Project Manager will soon be reporting to the AC/135 Transformation Steering Group (TSG). In connection with the SSC project, the development of a NATO Open Technical Dictionary (NOTD) has been
initiated to provide for ISO 22745 compliant data transfer between national codification bureaux and civilian manufacturers and suppliers.

Another TSG innovative approach is the Codification of Services. This project, led by the Czech Republic, has demonstrated potential to be explored. Although, for most nations, the codification of services is not within their current scope, discussions have shown that the nations are very keen to see this delivered. AC/135 will partner with ecl@ss to explore the possibilities of a joint venture to improve the deliverables.

The trial project will focus on codification of services and SSC, with the participation of Germany and New Zealand. The challenge ahead is to broaden the range of activities that can benefit from the codification of services. Transformation work is also underway with a view to incorporating volumetric data into international data exchanges. A list of field requirements will allow the new Volumetrics Data segment to be developed. This type of data may, however, be of limited use for international logistics. TSG is therefore focusing on areas of both national and international relevance.

The FLIS Transformation Initiative. The Federal Logistics Information System (FLIS) was last modernized in 1993, focusing at the time on a technology upgrade. Much of the data and its structure remained unchanged. The current initiative is focusing on the data and on how it supports the business processes. For each Segment, the project will review the data elements, determine whether and how the data is used, and ask customers what they like about the current structure and whether there are any problems or concerns. When the target data model has been approved, technology will be selected to support the new requirements. The transformation initiative will therefore involve both business process re-engineering and a technology upgrade. The end goal is to ensure that the FLIS data stays relevant and valuable to US customers and the AC/135 community.

The NCS College 2012. Organized for the first time in the Moravian city of Brno (Czech Republic), the 2012 NCS College was a successful event. It was held from 27 August to 21 September in the Czech University of Defence, in cooperation with the US Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Logistics Information Service and the Czech National Codification Bureau. The College had the benefit of lectures and organizational and technical assistance provided by the AURA company, together with support from AC/135, NCBs of France, Austria and Slovakia, NSPA, the Multinational Logistics Coordination Centre (MLCC) and the Defence and Security Industry Association of the Czech Republic. Participants included more than 30 codification experts and managers from Austria, China, the Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, NATO-E3A, Netherlands, NSPA, Oman, Serbia, Slovenia and South Africa. On successful completion of the NCS Course for Managers and Logisticians (27–31 August) and the NCS Course for Codifiers (3–21 September), certificates were awarded by the Rector-Commandant of the University of Defence. The NCS Course for Managers and Logisticians covered management of the codification processes and the logistics-codification interface, and provided the foundations for establishing a National Codification Bureau. Students attending the NCS Course for Codifiers enjoyed the opportunity to test MC CATALOGUE codification software for practical codification work. Consideration is now being given to regularly alternating an NCS College in Brno with the traditional NCB College organized by DLA Logistics Information Service in Battle Creek, Michigan (USA).

The Codification Workshop was held on 15–18 October under the auspices of the Jordanian Armed Forces Logistics Support Chief, Major General Ibrahim Al MAWAJDEH. The workshop was conducted by Mr Gouriou from the French NCB, with the participation of 35 directors and logistics officers.

AC135 Visit to Colombia took place from 4 to 6 December. The codification meeting included top officials of the MoD, such as Vice Minister of Defense Diana Quintero Cuello, as well as logisticians from the Military Services and officials from the Treasury Department. Colombia decided to officially apply for AC/135 sponsorship.

Following the successful Bruges Forum, AC/135 – in cooperation with the Danish MoD – is now preparing for the 2nd Codification World Forum to be held on 6-7 November 2013 in Copenhagen. The aim of such forums is meet codification customers with a view to understanding their expectations and to develop relations with users of other materiel identification systems. The 2nd Forum will expand on industry engagement and the NATO Smart Defence initiative. Mark your calendar!