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THE RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE IN ARMENIA (1)

Ömer Engin LÜTEM

During President Medvedevs visit to Armenia, an agreement which extended the term of the Russian military base in Gyumri and containing new obligations was signed on August 20. With an agreement signed in 1995 following the Karabakh conflict, a Russian military base was established in the city of Gyumri in Armenia which is approximately 20 km. to Turkey. This agreement was to be valid for 25 years and would end in 2020. With ten years remaining until the agreement would expire, extending this term unexpectedly for another 24 years until 2044 created astonishment. Without doubt, this shows that Russia is determined in maintaining their military presence in the Southern Caucasus and conveys a message to the US which attempts to have great dominance in this region by establishing close relations with Georgia for this purpose and which would have established the same relations with Azerbaijan if the Karabakh conflict had not existed. At the same time it also conveys a message to the European Union which tries to build relations with countries in this region through the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan. This way, Russia has demonstrated that no political development or initiative could take place in this region without its own will and/or contribution. Considering what benefit Armenia will gain from having a foreign military base in its country for a quarter of a century more, its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan must be observed. Armenia has a phobia towards Turkey and believes that Russia will protect them against Turkey. Since Turkey has not militarily intervened in any way during the Karabakh conflicts, this phobia is not substantial. On the other hand, after overcoming the existing difficulties, implementing the signed protocols and establishing normal relations between both countries as expected and hoped, what function could the Russian military base have for Turkey? The main reason for Armenia to accept the extension of the term and obligations of the Russian military base is not Turkey, but Azerbaijan. For the last couple of years, President Aliev has started stating more frequently that they want to settle the Karabakh conflict through peaceful means, but that they could resort to force if this is not possible. On the other hand, Azerbaijan is in a serious attempt to arm and is coming closer to their purpose of having an annual military defense budget equal to that of Armenias total budget. In the future, but not so far away, Azerbaijan establishing a military superiority over Armenia is inevitable. According to press news, in addition to the defense of Russias interests, the Gyumri Base would also ensure the security of Armenia jointly with the Armenian forces; moreover, modern and compatible arms and specialized military equipment would also be provided. In short, the Gyumri Base will protect Armenia if attacked and Russia will provide modern weapons to Armenia. Since the Gyumri Base

could be used to prevent a military intervention to Armenia, Azerbaijans policy of resorting to military opportunities in order to reclaim Karabakh and other Azeri territories becomes meaningless. This is not only an important development in Azerbaijan-Armenia relations, but is also significant for the future of the Southern Caucasus. Tomorrow we will address matters such as how Russia has presented this agreement, how Armenia and Azerbaijan has perceived it, what kinds of developments could take place in the Karabakh conflict from now on, and what the effect of the Russian Base in Gyurmi is on Turkey.

About the Author :

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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