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Russia stronger in the Southern Caucasus

On 19-22 August, the President of the Russian Federation Dmitri Medvedev visited Yerevan with a delegation including the foreign and defence ministers. During the visit, a range of documents was signed strengthening Armenia's military, political and economic dependence on Russia, and in more general terms – reinforcing Russia's position in the Southern Caucasus. This is part of the re-activation of Russian policy to regain control over the region.

The main result of the president's visit to Armenia was an extension of the agreement to station Russian forces in Armenia (the 102nd base in Gyumri) until 2044, although the current treaty was set to expire only in 2020. It has been speculated that the agreement may contain an extension of the mandate for the 102nd base to include a direct security guarantee for Armenia, as well as the possibility of the use of force beyond Armenian borders (the base formally protects the borders with Turkey and Iran). According to Yerevan's interpretation, this agreement is a measurable reinforcement of Armenia's position towards Azerbaijan. During the visit a range of economic agreements was also signed, including a plan to build a new nuclear reactor in Armenia, and a railway to Iran.

The signing of the military agreement, the rhetoric and the events accompanying the visit (an informal summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation was held in Yerevan at the same time) are demonstrations of the build-up of Russian domination in the security sphere in the Southern Caucasus and throughout the CIS. Increasing Armenia's dependence on Russia decreases chances of diversifying Yerevan's security policy, an expression of which was the attempts made in 2008-2010 to normalise Armenia's relations with Turkey. Russia's success in Armenia precedes another stage in its regional manoeuvres, namely the Russian president's visit (planned for 2-3 September) to Baku, a rival to Armenia, and currently less close to Moscow. <ks>