

Response of the Republic of Armenia to the alert No. 115/2026 of the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, published on 12 May 2026 (Blogger Alexander Lapshin Denied Entry to Armenia)

Freedom of expression, media pluralism and the safety of journalists are protected in Armenia through a robust legal and institutional framework, grounded in constitutional guarantees, media legislation and access-to-information safeguards. In particular, Armenian legislation protects the free and independent activity of journalists and media actors through constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information (Constitution, Articles 42 and 51), as well as through the Law on Mass Media, which guarantees free media activity and prohibits censorship, coercion and obstruction of lawful journalistic work (Article 4), protects journalistic sources (Article 5), and regulates accreditation on the basis of equality and non-discrimination (Article 6). Obstruction of the lawful professional activity of a journalist is also criminalised under the Criminal Code (Article 237).

Armenia's progress in the field of media freedom is also reflected in international assessments. According to Reporters without Borders, Armenia has significantly improved its position in terms of press freedom and journalists' working conditions since 2018. In the latest 2026 World Press Freedom Index, Armenia remains among the higher-ranked countries globally and is comparatively well placed within its wider regional context, with positive results in the area of journalists' safety, the legal framework and the broader social environment for media activity. In particular, Armenia's safety score of 86.46 out of 100 reflects a favourable environment for journalists and media actors to gather and disseminate information without unnecessary risk of physical harm, psychological or emotional pressure, or professional harm, including risks such as violence, arrest, intimidation or harassment. This reflects the country's continued commitment to maintaining an open, pluralistic and protected media environment, while continuing to address remaining challenges.

The issues of media freedom and pluralism as well as protection of journalists and media professionals is also part of Armenia's multilateral agenda. Armenia is actively engaged in number of international initiatives such as Forum on Information and Democracy, Open Government Partnership, Freedom Online Coalition, Council of Europe Campaign on Safety of Journalists (Journalists matter) and many other endeavors aimed at protecting free speech and the rights to seek, receive and impart information online and offline.

Armenia has been a staunch supporter and traditional co-sponsor of resolutions and mandates on freedom of expression and information and related issues in the General Assembly, Human Rights Council and the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Armenia has joined number of international documents on protection of journalists, such as Political Declaration of the High level Conference Safety of Journalists: “Protecting media to protect democracy” held in Vienna in 2022. There, Armenia pledged to keep up the progress on media freedom, continue efforts to advance national efforts and international cooperation to advance justice and accountability for prosecution of journalists, as well as cooperate with all interested parties to defend journalists in the event of armed conflict, in line with the IHL, and to elaborate workable mechanisms for protection on the ground.

As regards entry-related decisions, the grounds for refusing the issuance or extension of an entry visa to a foreigner, revoking an issued entry visa, or prohibiting entry into the Republic of Armenia are set out in Article 8 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Foreigners”. Article 8 provides that such measures may be applied only on grounds prescribed by law, including where:

1. The issuance (extension of validity) of an entry visa to a foreigner shall be refused, an issued entry visa shall be revoked, or entry into Armenia shall be prohibited if:

a) they have been deported from the territory of Armenia or deprived of a residency status, and three years have not elapsed since the entry into force of the decision on deportation or deprivation of residency status;

b) they have been subjected to administrative liability for violating this Law and have failed to perform the obligation imposed on them by the administrative act, except for cases where one year has elapsed since the moment of being subjected to administrative liability;

c) there is reliable data that they carry out activities, participate in, organize, or are a member of an organization whose purpose is to:

- inflict harm on the state security of Armenia, overthrow the constitutional order, or weaken the defense capability,

- carry out terrorist activities,

- illegally (without the appropriate permit) transport weapons, ammunition, explosives, radioactive materials, narcotics, or psychotropic substances across the border, or

- engage in human trafficking or exploitation, illegal crossing of the state border, or the organization of illegal migration;

d) they suffer from an infectious disease that poses a threat to public health, except for cases where they enter Armenia for the purpose of treating such a disease. The list of these infectious diseases shall be defined by the Government of Armenia;

e) when requesting an entry permit, they have submitted false information about themselves or have failed to submit the necessary documents, or there is data indicating that their entry or stay in Armenia has a purpose other than the declared one; or

f) there are other serious and substantiated threats posed by them to the state security or public order of Armenia;

g) they have been subjected to administrative liability for violating the legislation on ensuring road traffic safety and have failed to perform the obligation imposed on them by the administrative act, except for cases where one year has elapsed since the day the administrative act became unappealable.

2. The issuance (extension of validity) of an entry visa to a foreigner shall be refused, an issued entry visa shall be revoked, or entry into Armenia shall be prohibited if they have been sentenced to imprisonment by a judgment that has entered into legal force for committing a crime in Armenia.

The state agency authorized in the field of justice of Armenia shall immediately inform the state agency authorized in the field of police of Armenia regarding the entry into legal force of the Armenian court's judgment convicting the foreigner to imprisonment, for the purpose of initiating statutory deportation proceedings.

In the event that a deportation decision is rendered due to a foreigner being sentenced to imprisonment by a judgment that has entered into legal force, the foreigner's entry into Armenia shall be prohibited if, after the execution of the legally binding deportation decision, three years have not elapsed in the case of committing a crime of minor or medium gravity, five years in the case of a grave crime, and eight years in the case of an particularly grave crime.

The provisions of this Paragraph shall not apply to persons who have close relatives (spouse, child, father, mother, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather) residing in Armenia on legal grounds, as well as to persons wanted for committing a crime on the territory of Armenia.

3. An entry visa issued to a foreigner shall be revoked if they have commenced work in Armenia without a work permit, except for cases provided for by this Law.

4. By way of exception, in the presence of the grounds specified in Paragraph 1, Clauses "a", "b", and "g", the entry of foreigners may be permitted in strictly justified cases.

Against this background, the matter raised in the alert concerning Mr Lapshin is considered within Armenia's existing legal and institutional safeguards, which are designed to ensure respect for freedom of expression, journalistic activity and effective remedies.

At the same time, information concerning whether Mr Lapshin is subject to any entry restriction in Armenia constitutes personal data and may not be disclosed to third parties without his written consent. This does not affect the availability of relevant legal remedies under Armenian legislation for the person concerned.

The Armenian authorities remain committed to addressing any issues affecting journalists, media representatives or bloggers in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and relevant Council of Europe standards.