

## NEWS – ECIPE PRESS RELEASE – NEW POLICY BRIEF

# Audiovisual Services: A Neglected Area of EU Competitiveness

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**Brussels, 8 April 2026** - The EU is one of the world's largest exporters of audiovisual services, yet continues to carve this sector out of its trade agreements. A [new ECIPE Policy Brief](#) argues this stance is no longer sustainable – and that the 2026 regulatory review offers a rare opportunity to change course.

Between 2006 and 2023, EU audiovisual exports surged by 271 percent. Yet unlike telecommunications or computer services, audiovisual services remain almost entirely excluded from trade liberalisation, in both the GATS and EU bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), leaving EU companies facing market access barriers while weakening the EU's negotiating leverage.

***"The EU's exclusion of audiovisual services from trade agreements does not make sense. The digital economy is an area of EU competitiveness – and rules must align with that fact. Shielding this sector behind too strict regulation risks inviting reciprocal barriers against the EU's own growing exports"***, says Hannes Berggren, author of the brief.

Canada's recent levy on foreign streaming services is a "canary in the coalmine." If the EU persists in denying FTA commitments in audiovisual services, trading partners may impose their own restrictions on EU content exports. Meanwhile, the EU's approach is increasingly inconsistent: ambitious digital trade chapters coexist with a blanket exemption that prevents DG Trade from making any FTA commitments in the audiovisual services sector.

The 2026 review of EU audiovisual regulation is a concrete opportunity to act. The Policy Brief calls on the Commission to use it to increase liberalisation across the Single Market and unlock new mandates allowing DG Trade to make FTA commitments in audiovisual services. With the US raising trade barriers and global geopolitical uncertainty growing,

the EU should be deepening digital trade integration – especially in sectors where it holds a competitive advantage.

***“The 2026 review should amount to more than a bureaucratic exercise. It is a chance to reposition the EU as a confident player in digital trade – that can defend its cultural values without surrendering its commercial interests”***, adds Berggren.

A more liberal approach to audiovisual services would strengthen the EU's hand in digital trade negotiations and expand market opportunities for European companies in a sector where Europe already leads.

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