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## Forget about absurd votes on No Deal – MPs ought to be invoking GATT Article 24



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It is undeniable that the EU has been in the driving seat for Brexit negotiations to date.

The Withdrawal Agreement is specified under EU law – Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty – and has never worked for us. Without one, all the EU treaties stop applying as of 29th March.

However, should the UK leave the EU under what is wrongly referred to as a ‘No Deal’, trade deals would then be carried out under the international trade rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that the UK helped establish.

The 164 member WTO offers Britain a remarkable opportunity to leave the EU cleanly, avoiding all of the apocalyptic predictions set out by the likes of the CBI, Bank of England or Chancellor.

Because through GATT Article 24, the EU and UK are able to agree a very basic Free Trade Agreement that would keep tariffs at zero for the duration of the period the two sides negotiate a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.

Article 24 is by no means a final destination, it is simply a stop gap that would allow Britain to leave the EU on 29th March 2019 – as promised time and again by the Prime Minister – while at the same time, avoiding any uncertainty that could negatively impact our economy or that of the EU.

Some have been dismissive of Article 24, arguing that with tensions between the UK and the EU at an all-time high, it would be impossible to agree to a Free Trade Agreement. However, they are missing the point that such an agreement does not have to be comprehensive. All that is needed is a one-page agreement signed by both sides. Cambridge law expert Dr Lorand Bartels has written a bare bones agreement that would suffice in order to instigate Article 24.

By doing so, the UK would be protected from discrimination claims by other WTO members. In the event that other WTO members did make legal challenges against the UK, they take a number of years to be heard and a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement would be the ideal remedy anyway.

One of the greatest benefits of implementing Article 24 would be that businesses would avoid having to calculate 20,000 tariffs, many of which are complex with very slight variants for many products. Granted, customs declaration forms would need to be completed, just as they are for suppliers from the rest of the world. But the removal of tariffs would make this process extremely straightforward. HMRC have introduced Transitional Simplified Procedures (TSP) for the 145,000 VAT-registered businesses which trade with the EU (meaning only 7% of UK businesses and 12% of the UK economy) removing the need for full customs declarations at our borders and import duty payments.

It is absurd to be voting on No Deal today as the option really does not exist. There should be a meaningful vote on GATT Article 24 as a safe, alternative Brexit deal that would get Britain out of the EU with minimal drama. The British people expect their politicians to deliver on the result of the referendum without causing chaos, and Article 24 ensures that can happen.

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