

Poland's Accession to the European Union: Adaptation and Absorption

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1. Introduction

Poland's approaching integration with the European Union is accompanied by a busy schedule of accession talks and the need to close a large number of negotiation chapters. As integration draws near, well-rounded adaptation efforts are urgently needed.

Accession is a complicated process on all counts. Meeting EU conditions requires concerted efforts for successful economic, social, institutional and cultural adaptation. Under any other conditions, these changes would probably be much slower. With accession around the corner, most of them boil down to catching up with the civilizational mainstream which the European Union is co-shaping.

Poland's adaptation efforts have been described in length. They have generated many comments, disputes and emotion. The following article attempts to order these processes from the perspective of the general rules governing socio-economic development.

Socio-economic development has always been inseparable from changes in the social and international division of labor, which—in a feedback manner—have always been both a creative force and the result of technological progress. These processes have proceeded at various speeds in various territories and economies. They have been determined by both natural conditions and choices made by individuals, social groups and politics. They have also been motivated by the expected comparative and competitive advantages. Given the increasingly complicated networks of the social and international division of labor, individual components of the domestic and world economies will unavoidably undergo mutual adaptation. This also means an interflow of political, organizational, consumption, institutional, technological and cultural patterns—in other words, their absorption.

At first glance, all this seems obvious, but a deeper analysis requires a rational and efficient “operationalization” of activities. Rationality and efficiency are a sine qua non condition, especially when adaptation and absorption are concentrated in a short period of time. The history of European integration is full of examples and arguments confirming this statement, particu-

larly since the inception of the European Union. An additional problem is that the EU candidate countries from Central Europe, including Poland, display greater development disparities than those known to European integration in the past. This is the main reason why the characteristics of adaptation and absorption require deeper consideration.

The interdependence and co-determination of the components of reality is a basic feature of holistic methodology and the main pillar of system analysis. These components must constantly adjust to one another in the course of development, thereby undergoing *mutual adaptation*. One of the chief forms and ways of adaptation is reciprocity in the penetration of characteristics and properties of the adapting individual systems (economic units and national economies), hence their *absorption*. As a result, individual parts of the whole produce families, groups and classes of phenomena that are distinguishable by their dominating characteristics.

Since the emergence of the world economy in the second half of the 19th century, the international division of labor and its changes have imparted new dimensions to and elevated adaptation and absorption to a supranational level. The closely interrelated processes of the national and international division of labor necessitated and promoted a transfer of technological and organizational innovations. These circumstances, along with others, permit (though not necessarily determine) the economic development of various countries to attain an equalized level. Despite the many obstacles and limitations, they also contribute to the universality of certain production, consumption and organization patterns. The transfer of these patterns is usually accompanied by the mutual structural adaptation of national economies, chiefly by strengthening and deepening their complementarity.

All these circumstances taken together produce the material basis for integration within continents and continental subregions. This, in turn, is the main form and principal symptom of the current integration of the world economy, which nowadays takes the shape of globalization.

Adaptation and absorption have their objective and subjective nature: material, institutional and mental. Regardless of the degree of freedom in selecting the direction and type of these processes, adaptation and absorption are always accompanied by an act of will, by individual or collective decision. Since they usually appear as serial phenomena occurring over long time periods, these decisions (especially collective ones) are strategic in nature. They mainly involve politics, but also large economic units and corporations.

Even though adaptation and absorption are neither identical nor substitutive they are considered next to each other here. The adaptation of a given economic unit (irrespective of its scale) to new conditions, which always means a new form and manner of reaction by its environment, is always followed by the absorption of various patterns of activity, which are either produced autonomously or transferred from the outside. This signifies the

elimination of certain elements of the unit (e.g. fixed assets, changes in employment and its structure, changes in the regional location of activity as well as economic relations and proportions of activated resources) and the introduction of new elements. Thus there are phenomena of a different scale and range of structural changes that are only quantitative or both quantitative and qualitative, changes that are either gradual and slow or sudden changes that occur by leaps and bounds.

Thus adaptive processes signify, above all, a mutual structural adaptation of interrelated units and organisms, while absorptive processes signify the transmission of characteristics and properties of socio-economic processes from the units and organisms which had attained them earlier to these which have matured later¹. These features and properties are technological and organizational patterns, rules of the game within a given economic organism (always institutionally authorized) as well as broadly-understood patterns of consumption, culture and habits.

By all means, *adaptation is not identical with absorption, albeit both phenomena either induce or terminate each other in the chain of interactions in time and space.* If one of the systems is relatively autonomous and the other relatively subordinated (in the sense of taking from the first the necessary goods, services, information and patterns), then the first system can be labeled as an initiator (let alone a pattern) of changes. It emits information, in a way inducing the adaptation of the second system. If the latter's absorptive capacity is sufficient, i.e. the capacity to relatively efficiently adapt itself to the first system, then some distortions in the equilibrium of the first system will result in the adaptation processes in the second system. In such a case, absorption is a sine qua non condition of adaptation. Needless to say, the direction of changes can become either positive or negative due to the cyclical developments inherent in the market economy.

The interrelated systems can remain in a situation in which one of them can be called active and the other passive, and therefore adaptation and absorption can also be either active or passive—obviously, in relative terms and with respect to the definitive time spans.

Passivity boils down to limited absorptive capabilities in economic, technological, organizational, institutional, social, cultural and habitual terms. In such a situation, impulses flowing from the active system (pattern in dynamics) will encounter the absorptive barriers of the passive system, and the initially positive feedback will dwindle and in extreme cases disappear altogether. The reverse also holds true. If the impulses flowing from the active system can increase the absorptive capacity of the initially passive system, that is when the latter will strive consistently to assume an active position through its adaptive and absorptive efforts, the positive feedback of the two

¹ There is some affinity with "demonstration" and "emulation," yet adaptation and absorption permeate the socio-economic system more deeply.

systems will strengthen (synergetic effect). In other words, the initially passive system (e.g. less developed and structurally poorer than the active one) should have a certain strategy of action supported by the aim-oriented allocation even of its modest resources, thence be aware of his objective function (or rather a hierarchy of many objective functions). The strategy should be aimed, in the imaginable time horizon, at the achievement of a fully active position toward the environment of other systems. It does assume deploying adaptive possibilities and absorptive capabilities as well. Obviously, against the background of the constantly changing international division of labor, a *system capable of an efficient absorption of all convenient innovations becomes at the same time capable of emitting into the environment innovations generated by itself. In such a situation, this system may be labeled as the one capable of active absorption.*

Against this background, the question is whether adaptation and absorption processes are spontaneous or regulated. The economic history of the past several centuries clearly betrays a combination of these features, in various proportions and in different periods of development. Internationally, given the shaping of the world economy and globalization, it seems that spontaneity has prevailed, albeit many regulatory measures have also been applied. Along with the development of the capitalist market economy, international law has developed, and various long-term bilateral and multilateral treaties have been concluded. A long list of rules has been compiled and approved by the United Nations. Major international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization also continue their work. All these efforts have yielded a set of framework regulations and triggered an adaptive and absorptive evolution in the world.

The history of European integration and the track record of successfully completed projects—accompanied by those still in the planning stage—are proof that the spontaneous development of the market economy has been proceeding within an intricate framework of rules, many of them very precise and detailed. Transition in the postcommunist economies has apparently been managed by the relevant state authorities, with some participation and support from domestic and international organizations. Large international corporations (MNCs and TNCs) play a crucial role in shaping and developing the world economy today. They make their own strategic rules, yet they must comply with the provisions of national and international law.

Even though this picture is far from complete, it sufficiently confirms the combination of spontaneous and regulated activities as part of both country- and worldwide adaptation and absorption. A more precise picture of this combination could be obtained with regard to individual national economies or their regions within certain time spans. From this perspective, the authorities' plans for the future invite many questions and policy recommendations, which, however, should not be doctrinally petrified.

2. Structural aspects

Mutual adaptation between systems and absorptive transitions is determined by the structures making up these systems. They either result from the already existing complementary relations or create new ones. The flow of goods, services, money and information as well as international and interregional trade point to a dynamic nature of adaptation and absorption. This involves direct adjustment, and below, at the local level, international adjustment continues; yet this adjustment is indirect and derivative. It is not, however, a steady state since what is local at one time may become countrywide and/or international at other times. Economic activities characterized by what is called "bounded localization," connected with natural resources or the climatic conditioning of various kinds of production, are exceptional. These spheres are principally not losing their historical importance, but in the course of socio-economic development, the dominance of adaptive and absorptive processes is constantly shifting towards activities of a relatively free localization.

The above-mentioned shift is a vivid result of the historical evolution in proportions between the first, second and third sectors. The problem, however, remains: in the first sector (mineral resources, agriculture, forestry and fisheries), with the increasing needs and competitive forces, there is a permanent pressure on adaptation and absorption, notwithstanding the fact that the sector's adaptive and absorptive capacities are lower than those of other sectors (one cannot forget the higher-than-average capital output ratio in this realm at this point). Consequently, in general, adaptation and absorption are proceeding rather sluggishly here. There exist, obviously, cases of jumpy events. All that provides a solid basis for strategy and policy formation and fairly distinctly points to their time horizons.

In relations between Poland and the EU, adjustment in the first sector is underway and is expected to continue in the future. The extraction of mineral resources will not make Poland a European basin of raw materials, but the Polish resources are more than sufficient for domestic demand. Mining output in Poland has gradually been adjusted to domestic demand, and EU accession will make it necessary to adapt to the new needs. Meeting this objective is difficult, however, since the direction and type of technological progress are not known. Forecasts referring to energy output, due to the substitution of coal by oil and natural gas and stricter environmental standards, are also burdened with uncertainty. This is just one of many examples proving that none of the adaptation processes can be completed in the institutionally set period.

Absorptive processes in this area face high running challenges, both in active and passive terms. Most of all, they refer to the absorption of technological innovations and environmental protection methods and technologies. It is an area where Poland's capacity for shaping patterns for the European Un-

ion as a whole is worth emphasizing. The aim here is to skillfully use this potential to strengthen the country's comparative and competitive advantages.

A much more complicated situation concerns the part of the first sector embracing forestry, fisheries and, first of all, agriculture. If confronted with the EU, development disparities are the greatest in the agrarian realm (ownership relations, the size of farms) and in the productive and technological sphere.

Adaptation in agriculture, which represents the most difficult chapter in the ongoing accession negotiations, requires a dramatic shift from passive to active absorption position. This primarily applies to the agrarian structure rather than production and technology.

Poland's own models in areas such as organic farming should not be underestimated, even though EU competition is increasingly stiffer in this area. It is rather universally known that restructuring in Polish agriculture calls for an increase in both the inherent capital accumulation potential and investment. In addition, substantial and lasting financial support is needed from both domestic and EU sources. In this realm, a mounting social problem involves the outflow of several million people from agriculture, posing a skill barrier and a mental challenge to adaptation and absorption.

EU agriculture reveals several different "models" depending on natural conditions. Adaptation is taking place within this framework (which does not mean that some general features of European agriculture can be neglected here). EU farmers constantly produce large export surpluses, so the inclusion of Polish agriculture will result in additional supplies. However, in order to participate in the exportation of EU agricultural produce, Poland needs to meet high-quality standards, which again leads to the problem of absorption.

Adaptation of Polish agriculture to EU organizational and market conditions requires a proper assessment of its production capacity and an ability to adapt supply to demand. This problem has got two layers: the size of the EU market and the size of the domestic market. Both of them depend on changes in the purchasing power of potential buyers and the structure of demand. Market mechanisms will always play an important regulatory role here, but they have to be supported by appropriate institutional regulations, both international and domestic. The eternal agrarian problem is that, particularly in this realm, adaptation and absorption are intertwined with spontaneous forces and regulatory acts of institutional will. Proportions of these factors can vary in individual historical periods, but they cannot substitute one another. Nobody in the world is a slave of the market "theology" in this area.

The absorptive problems of agriculture are strongly connected with the information infrastructure of the country and the efficient functioning of the administrative, banking and financial systems. EU financial assistance directed to agricultural output and rural areas must be accompanied by absorption compatible with the intentional appropriation of these financial in-

flows. This, in turn, for the sake of due control, requires relevant computerization arrangements. Since financial assistance from the Union is usually supplemented by domestic sources for the majority of projects, domestic financial, investment and organizational efforts require surmounting mental barriers, in addition to perfecting the activities of the administrative apparatus, securing a smooth flow of financial streams and efficiently preparing development projects. All that proves that efficiency in inspiring and regulating the absorptive capacities apparently calls for creating these capacities. A proper appreciation of these principles at the central decision-making level is doomed to failure unless it is adequate to appreciation at the local level.

While the scope of adaptation and absorption regulations (decreed by both the national states and EU authorities) relating to the first sector is broad and detailed, the second sector, manufacturing, offers much more maneuvering room for market forces. Therefore the results of market competition are much greater there.

The more stringent environmental standards and antimonopolistic rules, coupled with trade code norms and regional development policies, create a framework for the functioning of market forces. However, they fail to deal with one important problem: the operations and interests of oligopolies and multinational corporations (MNCs and TNCs) are often global in nature. Oligopoly strategies are autonomous yet concordant with the requirements of EU institutions and member countries. This involves the collision-free content of the strategy in the face of the interests of all the parties involved. The frequent practice of bypassing antimonopolistic laws by multinationals through various strategic alliances (even among competing corporations) offers ample room for allocation. This undermines the strategic objectives of the Union and its member countries. In many cases, the freedom of market competition becomes quite formal; adaptation and absorption in the second and third sectors remain under the growing pressure and impact of corporate decisions. These decisions are more often than not harmonized with one another and made beyond the jurisdiction of the Union and its member countries, complying only with the very general framework of the legal system.

As times pass, these problems appear to be stronger for both the Union and its prospective member countries. Attempts by the EU and its member states to indirectly influence the allocation endeavors of large corporations—using economic measures—are rather difficult and limited, especially as MNC decision-making bodies are in many cases located outside the Union, and the supposed supranational character of these corporations is often questionable. Whatever is difficult for the Union as an organization is even more difficult for the less developed and poorer countries such as Poland. The poorer countries striving for foreign direct investment (FDI) are rarely able to exert a tangible impact on the type of these investments and their technological level. This particularly holds true for those sectors of the national economy which may become active absorptively in the future. These

mainly include high-tech sectors in which large corporations retain their dominant positions, successfully defending their competitiveness. The EU's future heavily depends on when, if at all, the above-mentioned problems are solved. The Union is not separated from the rest of the world and faces adaptive and absorptive challenges as a whole.

Obviously, the situation in individual branches of the manufacturing sector varies. For example, in some branches with foreign capital involvement such as food processing, qualitative and sanitary standards—of critical importance to competitive strength and advantages derived from productivity and the level of output costs—as well as the available technology should easily meet the requirements of the competition. This could exemplify effective adaptation, but an active absorption opening the way for creating technological patterns has not been available here. Only the development of the R & D sector, solidly incorporated into the structure of the economy, would mean that corporate capital contributes to the making of a knowledge-based society. This would increase the potential of the economy and its adaptive and absorptive capacities. The connection with the country's efforts in education and research and the growth in the general level of skills is quite apparent here, but with a significant share of foreign capital in the overall economic potential. Employee adaptation (in terms of age, gender and skills) largely depends on corporate decisions and strategy.

These problems are important for both the countries aspiring to join the European Union and for the Union as a whole. *The Union's adaptive and absorptive capabilities, particularly in the contemporary global economy, depend upon its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis global corporations and also upon either harmonizing or even subordinating the corporate strategies to the Union's development strategy.* Such subordination, not excluding the juridical instruments, may first of all take shape of economic instruments powerful enough to exert due impact on their recipients. Quite obviously, the question here is whether, in the present circumstances of the high deregulation of the global economy, such an activity can be successful. If not, some kind of re-regulation—varying in strength—could eventually become necessary in some areas. One can assume against this background that the well-established indicative planning methods practiced for a long time in various countries worldwide may provide the necessary inspiration in the face of the above-mentioned challenges.

The service (third) sector plays a special and historically unprecedented role in the current adaptation and absorption processes. The sector has not only become dominant in developed economies, but is developing rapidly elsewhere. Thanks to the strong expansion of the media and the rapid growth of dense transportation and communication networks, societies' technological, organizational and consumption habits have become spatially transitory to an unprecedented degree. Participation in the worldwide flow of information or the lack of such participation has become a crucial condition for shar-

ing the outcomes of civilization's progress and helping shape the knowledge-based society.

Similar to other areas, symmetry between adaptation and absorption in this area depends to a large extent on the general level of civilizational advancement. The necessary absorption² requires the existence of an adequate financial basis, technical arrangements, logistic networks and relevant organizational experience. All this calls for rather big and expensive fixed capital investments. The demand for services depends on the purchasing power of users, which is also an absorption barrier. Moreover, users should be capable of absorption, numerous enough in the skill groups, and most importantly—aware of the reception need.

Illusions should be avoided that overcoming the adaptive and absorptive barriers—augmented by the above-mentioned asymmetry—within the third sector would be an easy task. Even in a nation characterized by a relatively high level of education and culture (as Poland), this does not smoothly translate into such patterns of production and organizational culture and social discipline that arise from the adaptation challenges.

3. The threshold periods

In the world's socio-economic history, great periods of adaptation and absorption can be identified, and within these periods threshold periods can be classified. The duration of the latter has varied, yet over the past few centuries, these periods have grown shorter, even for countries labeled as backward. Actually, Poland is passing through such a threshold period in its efforts to enter the EU, and if it succeeds, this period should be as short as possible. This, however, means enhancing the adaptation and absorptive capacities. Augmenting these capacities will make it possible to attain an active absorption position, an innovative position enabling consistent active participation in the general technological and organizational progress as well as in solving the world's social problems. Obviously, this is an objective for more than one generation; therefore it is an objective of the highest rank.

Membership in the EU may contribute, though not automatically, to the facilitation and acceleration of these goals, yet under two principal conditions. The first refers to the transfer of technology accompanying FDI. Union membership should be conducive to this goal, but domestic policies should be aimed at selectively supporting such endeavors, particularly if domestic R & D capacity is strengthened. The second condition is the strongest possible domestic support of R & D, selective and realistic assessment of one's own possibilities and goals, and taking into account the Union's strategy in science and technology. In other words, Poland should strive to secure permanent

² Notably, in some cases, absorption concerns negative or even pathological phenomena and attitudes—from the perspective of health, personal habits and so on. This, however, is a question of "filters," which are always controversial and ambiguous.

participation in relevant EU programs, especially as this can bring about an inflow of financial aid.

A threshold period can be related to both the national economy as a whole and individual regions. For each region, however, significant differences exist, leading to differences in the modes of action and their time horizons. The internally polarized structures (in the sense of deep differences in regional development and advancement in Poland's case) hamper adaptation measures against the external environment of the national economy. Under such circumstances, absorptivity and innovative buoyancy are rather limited.

Adaptation and absorption are both the result of and reason behind the complementarity of national economies and their components (regions), against the framework of the social and international division of labor. If this complementarity is insufficient, it hampers adaptation and absorption. There is a margin of tolerance under the impact of the growth rate. A relatively high growth rate concomitant to a differentiating economic structure contributes to narrowing such margins. It cannot, however, be dealt with without due attention paid to the time horizons, because the threshold period as a rule is a long-term one. Complementarity in strategy terms can be only reached in the long term. Generally speaking, *at the moment, particularly in the case of Polish accession to the EU, the sensitivity of complementary activities runs high, and this is also tantamount to adaptive sensitivity*. There are plenty of reasons behind that: the structural complexity of today's developed economies, the bulky character of large investment outlays (especially with respect to infrastructure), the technical precision of final-product components, organizational precision in technological processes, and dependence on information in economic processes—to name a few.

4. The spatial development problem

Bottlenecks in development caused by shortages and gaps in infrastructure networks (as in Poland) may dramatically limit even significant absorptive capacities by hampering the mobility of labor. Similarly, a negative impact may be exerted by underdeveloped information networks. These networks should be developed in a manner adequate to both all other domestic components and the needs of European integration. Physiographic constraints notwithstanding (which can often be avoided), impediments may arise from either excessive metropolization sprawl or from monocultural type of development.

The universality of adaptation and absorption processes also refers to their spatial dimension. In the EU, regional development has long remained in the center of attention, with a view to approaching equalized regional-development opportunities. Therefore regional policy enjoys considerable financial support. By the very nature, these activities are strictly intertwined with environmental protection and conservation. These policies would be completely useless if they were not combined with regional development pol-

icies. The free movement of factors of production throughout EU territory results in changes in fixed capital location and settlement, showing the significance of regional development. These changes are both a reason and motivation for permanent adaptive and absorptive processes.

These processes are taking place among and within states as interregional relations and relations between the neighboring regions of EU member countries. The idea and institution of Euroregions has been devised as a leverage in the integration process. However, the results of these efforts have been rather modest so far. Interregional integration has proceeded rather slowly because many formal constraints have not been removed, and local communities have not become sufficiently involved and interested in the process. Moreover, governmental attention has been far from satisfactory. Among the several visions of the EU after integration is the idea of a Europe of regions. However, this idea does not seem competitive with regard to other concepts and visions. From the perspective of the progress of integration, such a situation does not seem favorable. Besides it shows that the heavily promoted "subsidiarity principle" is not understood properly and has failed to materialize so far.

Adaptation and absorption are clearly multi-layer processes, but they seem to function the most smoothly (though not necessarily spectacularly) on the regional and local levels. The relatively slow pace of these spontaneous processes can accelerate considerably if large-scale restructuring endeavors are undertaken (e.g. by phasing out some structures and establishing new ones).

The regional dimension of adaptation and absorption is especially significant in densely populated and highly urbanized areas, because environmental and recreational factors come into play there. Poland is no exception in this respect; all of Europe faces the same problem. In this case, adaptation means choosing and securing areas for specific purposes with recreational and ecological considerations in mind. In such areas, economic activities, either privileged or limited and targeted at specific types of capital investment contribute to the equalization of regional chances in terms of the income levels of residents and the general level of development.

A look from this angle reveals that some regions in Poland have substantial opportunities for development. Tapping these opportunities may become an important contribution to the quality of life in all of Europe. However, in this case, absorption depends on the observance of quality standards, both with respect to environmental protection and recreational services. This task is made difficult by various adaptation and absorption problems that recur in technical, economic and social infrastructure.

It can be rightly assumed that if these problems are addressed in the ongoing accession negotiations, and if the huge advantages they offer are understood properly, they cannot but influence the attitudes of the general public in both the Union and the candidate countries. Apprehension and prejudice

on both sides, which pose a mental barrier to adaptation and absorption, arise mainly from ignorance and/or underestimation of the real development potential. But most of all, they are rooted in the fact that the idea of sustainable growth is paving its way to the universal consciousness in such a painstaking manner.

Against the background of these considerations, two important problems arise in connection with the development strategy and policies.

The first refers to the time frame and horizons of adaptation and absorption. The accession requirements themselves set the time frame for the candidate countries to meet minimal conditions determined by the Union's cohesion principles. These are accompanied by dispensation periods, which boil down to understanding that many acts and activities linked with adaptation and absorption cannot be skipped. But this also means that these processes cannot be terminated after accession. Stopping them would run against the very nature of development. The difference between adaptation and absorption before and after accession will refer to the fact that these processes would become common for both the new member country and the Union. Without exaggeration, it can be said that for the member country it would mean a real historical turning point—especially as adaptation to globalization processes together with the Union and beyond it will bring about dramatic differences. Figuratively speaking, submersion into the “integration river” makes thinking and acting in terms of remote time horizons imperative. This, of course, also covers the phasing out of the process.

The second problem refers to the formulation of an accession strategy as a part and parcel of the general domestic development strategy. Some basic parts of it are already available in Poland, but too many examples prove that this strategy is neither comprehensive nor internally consistent. All too often the government's decision-making centers, when referring to absorption, exclusively emphasize the absorption of financial aid from the Union. Even then the conditioning of these activities is interpreted in too narrow a manner. The complexity of this process is still far from understood properly, while a fragmented approach is an apparent drawback for problems that reach very far on the time axis and deeply permeate the social organism.

A review of the structural aspects of the issue requires a sector approach, because adaptation and absorption in different sectors are neither simultaneous nor symmetrical. If the structural picture were drafted in a more detailed manner (i.e. involving branches, ranges of products and spatial factors), the following requirements would arise:

- formulation of a multi-layer program for adaptation and absorption;
- identification of the various possible rates of change;
- identification of possible bottlenecks;
- an assessment of the inevitable asymmetry of the expected events.

Such a program—a kind of dynamic mapping—would allow for a closer recognition of where and to what extent one can rely on spontaneous market forces, and where and to what extent some regulations and incentives are needed on both the domestic and EU level. This kind of programming is equally significant for the candidate countries and the Union as a whole.

A comprehensive strategy is needed to not only determine the efficiency of endeavors, but help overcome mental barriers stemming from insufficient knowledge about the development opportunities.

Abstract **Poland's Accession to the European Union: Adaptation and Absorption**

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Adaptive processes signify, above all, a mutual structural adaptation of inter-related units and organisms, while absorptive processes signify the transmission of characteristics and properties of socioeconomic processes from the units and organisms which had attained them earlier to those which have matured later. These features and properties are technological and organizational patterns, rules of the game within a given economic organism (always institutionally authorized) as well as broadly understood patterns of consumption, culture and habits. By all means, adaptation is not identical with absorption, albeit both phenomena either induce or terminate each other in the chain of interactions in time and space. The author discusses consecutively the structural and spatial aspects of the problem, addressing it to the Polish accession to the EU.