The Office of the Provost, CEU, cordially invites you to the inaugural lecture of the Humanities and Social Sciences Lecture Series

“Synergies and Critique in the Humanities and the Social Sciences” is the theme of the first of a series of lectures organized by the Provost’s Office. The series explores points of engagement between the humanities and the social sciences, through lectures and seminars delivered by leading scholars working at the interface of the two areas. The series is part of a wider initiative at CEU to promote the humanities and their continued engagement with the social sciences.

“The Cunning of Uncertainty”

delivered by

Helga Nowotny

President, European Research Council
Professor Emerita of Social Studies of Science, ETH, Zurich

“The dominant Western narrative tells of a trajectory from fate to taking destiny into one’s own hands. It has induced fantasies of control, based on a craving for certainty which frequently oscillates between fear and over-confidence. Today, the concept of the future has become fragile and plural. Crisis is no longer seen as a turning point, but as a perpetuated condition. Risks are often (mis)interpreted as dangers and a feeling of overwhelming complexity fails to deliver the promise of heightened certainty.

Coping with uncertainty raises questions about the limitations of what can be predicted, especially about the unintended consequences of intentional human action. But there is more to it. I will argue that the cunning of uncertainty is at work. Foremost, science thrives at the cusp of uncertainty and its cunning operates in creative ways. Today, innovation dominates the political agenda, downplaying its inherent uncertainty and its forces of creative destruction. Yet, unintended consequences and errors are an integral part of the social world. My question therefore is: can society instead of being stifled by uncertainty, learn to embrace it and become open towards an evolving future?”

Chair:
Katalin Farkas,
Provost/Academic Pro-Rector

Date:
February 11, 2014

Time:
6:00 p.m.

Venue:
CEU Auditorium
(Nador u. 9)

Reception to follow

Helga Nowotny is Professor Emerita of Social Studies of Science, ETH Zurich, and a founding member of the European Research Council. In 2007 she was elected ERC Vice President and in March 2010 succeeded Fotis Kafatos as President of the ERC. Her term as President of the ERC ended in December 2013. She holds a PhD in Sociology from Columbia University, and a doctorate in jurisprudence from the University of Vienna. After a distinguished teaching and research career, with positions in Vienna, Bielefeld, Cambridge, Berlin, Paris, Budapest and Zurich, her current host institution is the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF). Nowotny is a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and a long-standing member the Academia Europaea, member of the Governing Board of the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, and of other international advisory boards and selection committees. Among the prizes and awards she has received is the J. D. Bernal Prize for her life-long achievements in STS, and doctorates honoris causa from several European universities. In November 2013 she received a doctor honoris causa at the Weizmann Institute of Science.