Preliminary Examination in Eastern Europe

Instructions: Please answer one question from each of the sections (for a total of 3 essay answers). Be sure each essay has a clear line of argument, addresses as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offers relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate. Good luck!

Section One

1. The traditional meta-narrative of Eastern European history posits its pre-modern and modern period as one lagging behind developments in Western Europe. Discuss the origins and evolution of the backwardness paradigm and its significance in assessing the character of Eastern European modernity. Who are its representatives? What are the theoretical and empirical foundations on which it is based? Evaluate its implications, contemporary relevance (if any), and the critical responses it elicited.

2. How does the scholarship on 1989 fit in a longue-durée approach to the historiography of the Balkans? Discuss the common themes, assumptions and theoretical and methodological choices. Evaluate briefly the place of the literature on the break-up of Yugoslavia in an overall account of East European post-socialism.

Section Two

1. Liberalism and socialism in the Balkans have often been characterized as ‘interesting’, anomalous, perverted or exotic. Discuss the scholarship on the transfer, adaptation and transformation of the Western political ideologies of liberalism and socialism in the Balkan space in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. What are the peculiarities of the history and historiography of liberalism and socialism in the Balkans? Discuss the underlying assumptions, theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches shaping the existing literature. What is the current state of the field and how have recent interventions refashion the problem?

2. Discuss the challenges faced by Eastern European states in the interwar period. How have historians assessed the period’s “illiberal directions” and the rise of authoritarian regimes in the 1920s and 1930s?

Section Three

1. The intellectual scene of interwar Eastern Europe was shaped by fervent debates on national identity. Tradition and modernity, East and West or the village and the city clashed in virulent disputes over the most appropriate path of development for Eastern European nations. Using concrete examples from several countries describe and analyze the origins, content, implications and varying intensity of these debates. Is there a historiographical consensus behind the main body of works addressing this question?

2. Describe and analyze the evolution of the historiography of nineteenth century Eastern European nationalism. What is the assessment of Eastern European nationalism within the larger European framework? What are the intellectual origins and theoretical underpinnings of this diverse literature? Focus on two or three countries (preferably from both East-Central Europe and Southeastern Europe) and discuss common trends and divergent interpretations.