April 2015 Preliminary Examination in Eastern Europe

Instructions: Please answer three questions of your choice from the six below. 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!

1. The decline of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires has sparked a significant historiographical debate over its course and origins. Examine the main lines of research devoted to this issue, making sure to discuss the various interpretations of stagnation, Westernization, the influence of capitalism, and the role of the “Eastern Question”. What was the empirical foundation for these theories and which lacunae can you pinpoint in their respective narratives?

2. Analyze the body of work analyzing the formation of nation states in Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Choose two or three concrete examples and use them as case studies to discuss common trends and disparate narratives in the rise of the nation-state as a dominant form of modern social organization.

3. Discuss the problem of economic backwardness in Eastern Europe, with respect to its historical origins and consequences for society and politics. Describe the various responses by intellectual and political elites to the problem, and how they shifted from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, including liberalism, socialism, peasantism, as well as the historiographic debates between westernizers/modernizers and traditionalists.

4. What were the origins and characteristics of the nationalist movements in the multi-national Habsburg and Ottoman empires? Discuss how class/status, language, and religion conditioned the emergence of these nationalisms. In what ways did the social, cultural, and political changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provide the impetus for their emergence? What was the attitude of the respective imperial regimes to these movements? Discuss several concrete examples.

5. Analyze the socio-political scene of Eastern Europe in the interwar period, particularly in relationship to the “failure of liberal democracy” and the rise of autocratic regimes in the 1920s and 1930s. To what extent were regional developments linked to wider European patterns? What explanatory paradigms are used to analyze the emergence of far-right and left politics before and during the Second World War?

6. The role of religion is receiving greater and justified historiographical attention today. On the other hand, the problematic of religious conversion, in particular, has had an older pedigree, and has been often at the center of national (and nationalistic) historiographies, especially in the Balkans. Discuss the main trends in this historiography as well as the new theoretical insights coming from comparative work on conversion in a global perspective.