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People's votes, people's voices: Popular voting in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the light of online public spheres

The paper sets off from the premise, that the 2014 referenda in Crimea and the Donbas region as well as the same year's Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections had major influences on the (re)building and consolidation of regional and national political constituencies. The paper argues that not the fairness and transparency of these popular voting practices (which should be doubted in case of the referenda) were crucial for their socio-political effects, but their symbolical and performative dimensions: By staging a political-cultural link between diverse parts of society, the state, and regional power groups, they legitimated decisions and created new realities.

In order to explore the societal perceptions of these transformative voting events, the paper investigates how they were commented and discussed on social network sites. The focus of the discourse analysis is twofold: First, it seeks to shed light on the adoption and (re)construction of collective interpretative frames as expressed in Russian and Ukrainian press. Second, it focuses on individual narratives and positioning connected to the voting events. Of particular interest are articulated feelings of national or regional belonging as well as the potency of (geo)political imaginations and historical myths. By tracing the discursive shifts of the discussions before, during and after the voting events, their performative effects will be highlighted.