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‘ACHILLES’ HEEL’ AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

A Corpora Analysis of Journalistic Texts^{1,2}

ABSTRACT: The study examines the well-known and metaphorically often used, popular idiomatic expression ‘Achilles’ heel’ in the Slovak corpus of journalistic texts, in the context of social and democratic processes. The research is based on the ethno-linguistic explanation of the phraseological units containing the word ‘heel’. The study uses the tools of corpus linguistics to verify the frequency, collocation fields and contextual use of given phraseological phrases. It focuses on identifying key areas of Slovak society that are named in journalism by the unflattering attribute of the Achilles’ heel, i.e. a weak, vulnerable point, etc. The research is carried out in two corpora: 1. in the corpus of written texts prim-10.0-public-inf (SNK public inf version 10.0, Size: 1,163,232,349) and 2. in the time-limited corpus of the SME daily in the period since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine 01/2022 – 06/2023.³ The comparison of the two corpora points to different

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³ Slovak National Corpus – corpus sme01-2022az06-2023. Bratislava: L. Štúr Institute of Linguistics SAS 2023, at <https://korpus.sk> (accessed from 1 September 2024 till 15 January 2025).

weak and vulnerable points (the so-called Achilles' heels) of Slovak society (and democracy) as they appear in journalistic texts.

Keywords: Achilles' heel, society, Slovakia, democracy, corpora

INTRODUCTION

The European Union is based on the ideals of economic, territorial, and social cohesion, as well as the promotion of democratic values among its member states. However, when looking at some of these ideals in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, several weaknesses become apparent, revealing the 'Achilles' heel' of democratic systems in terms of their stability.

Democracy is meant to be a robust system, at its core consisting of mechanisms of accountability, citizen participation, and the separation of powers.⁴ Nevertheless, some post-totalitarian societies continue to bear the remnants of authoritarian practices. In the last few years, we observe a manifestation of this practice in political groups defending radical ideologies and using populist rhetoric, which strengthens nationalist and (sometimes also) religious symbols to simplify complex political issues. These tactics marginalize critical discourse, polarize society, divide citizens into hostile factions, hinder open political debate,⁵ and ultimately threaten democratic engagement. This divisive atmosphere, where citizens are encouraged to view the world in binary 'us vs. them' optics, highlights a vulnerable aspect of democracy, which has been exacerbated by populist tendencies.

ACHILLES' HEEL(S) IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

When considering the potential weakening of a democratic system, several vulnerabilities can be identified, which in our text we metaphorically refer to as the 'Achilles' heel'. For example, the erosion of civil society presents a direct threat to democratic pluralism. Political factions attempting to dismantle or limit the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reflect the growing authoritarian tensions within the system. NGOs, which play a vital role in holding governments accountable, are increasingly seen as obstacles to national progress, further limiting the space for democratic engagement. This reveals another critical flaw in the democratic system: the selective

⁴ See N. Urbinati, *Me People. How Populism Changes Democracy*, Harvard 2019, p. 21; T.S. Pappas, *Populism and Liberal Democracy. A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis*, Oxford 2019, p. 16.

⁵ V. Gondeková, 'Persuasive-Communication and Manipulative-Communication Concepts in Television Programme of the Reality TV Genre,' *Media Literacy and Academic Research. Scientific Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2018), p. 52.

application of democratic principles in favor of narrow political interests, which ultimately undermines the ideals on which democracy stands.⁶

In an environment where the very definition of democracy has weakened, political actors often invoke democratic language, even though their policies contradict democratic ideals. Corruption, nepotism, and centralized decision-making persist, indicating a disconnect between the democratic framework and the reality of governance. The existence of this gap between idealism and practice is a key weakness – an 'Achilles' heel' of democracy – which is further exacerbated by the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals, diminishing the justice and transparency necessary for democracy to function properly.

Moreover, the rise of democratic despotism, where top-down authority prevails over democratic discussion, amplifies this vulnerability. Political decisions based on expertise are increasingly politicized, undermining the quality of political debate and eroding the role of evidence-based decision-making.⁷ As public discourse becomes polarized and reduced to ideological extremes, it becomes increasingly difficult for citizens to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue, further entrenching societal divisions. This strengthens the metaphor of the 'Achilles' heel' – the vulnerability of democracy to authoritarian forces that disrupt its ability for sound reasoning and civic engagement.

The cult of personality is another dangerous phenomenon that threatens the integrity of democracy. The growing influence of individual political figures, rather than collective decision-making, strengthens the dangerous reliance on so-called charismatic leaders. In a system where political discourse is shaped more by media campaigns and behind-the-scenes interest groups than by open public dialogue, democracy becomes more susceptible to manipulation by invisible elites.⁸ This concentration of power further weakens democratic processes and exposes another critical fault line in democracy.

This vulnerability is also exacerbated by the information environment. The spread of disinformation and polarized narratives in the media and on social platforms complicates citizens' ability to discern truth and meaningfully engage in political processes. This confusion and fragmentation of public discourse, combined with the rise of populist movements, may cause citizens to withdraw from active political participation, further deepening the weakening of democratic structures. This detachment from civic duties is yet another symptom of the fragile state of the democratic system – its Achilles' heel.

While democracy is a dynamic and evolving system, the threats to its stability are significant. The weakening of civil society, persistent corruption, the growing influence of economic elites, and the erosion of informed public discussion all point to the inherent vulnerability of the democratic process. Just as the myth of Achilles tells of a hero with a fatal flaw, democracy faces its own 'Achilles' heel' – a series of interconnected

⁶ N. Urbinati, *Me People...*, p. 46.

⁷ T.S. Pappas, *Populism and Liberal Democracy...*, p. 142.

⁸ D. Stasavage, *The Decline and Rise of Democracy*, Princeton 2020, p. 67.

weaknesses that, if left unaddressed, could lead to the collapse of the democratic structure.⁹ Without addressing these vulnerabilities, democracy risks devolving into a non-liberal or authoritarian system.

Aware of this context, we look at the contexts in which idiomatic expressions (containing the word ‘Achilles’ heel’) occur in selected journalistic corpora.

ACHILLES’ HEEL AND ITS ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

In Slovak, the heel plays an important role in creating a linguistic image of the world. The heel, as part of the foot, enables movement (dynamic walking, running; static – standing), provides stability (helps a person stand upright), and balance, as well as allows for changes in direction.

The aspect of movement is reflected in idiomatic expression, literally translated from the Slovak language, such as: ‘to walk/ go/ stride in someone’s heels’ (*chodiť/ ísť/ kráčať niekomu v pätách*, slov.), ‘to be on someone’s heels’ (*byť niekomu za pätami*, slov.), or ‘to hang on someone’s heels’ (*visieť niekomu na pätách*, slov.). Similarly, expressions like ‘to keep on someone’s heels’ (*držať sa niekomu v pätách*, slov.) or ‘to step/ tread on someone’s heels’ (*stúpať/ šliapať niekomu na päty*, slov.) mean that someone is persistently following or strictly monitoring someone. Other expressions, like ‘to stick to someone’s heels/ to cling to someone’s heels’ (*lepiť sa/ prilepiť sa/ vešať sa niekomu na päty*, slov.) imply constant surveillance or excessive presence in someone’s life. To ‘turn/ to twist on one’s heel’ (*otočiť sa/ zvrtnúť sa na päte*, slov.) can mean a quick change of direction or a sudden ending, usually due to emotional tension. To ‘pull out/ to stick out one’s heels’ (*vytiahnuť/ vystrčiť päty*, slov.) means to leave or escape from somewhere, sometimes running away from someone or something.

In the Slovak language, one of the frequently used somatic idioms is ‘a thorn in the heel’ (*trň v päte*, slov.) when the thorn represents an inconvenience or difficulty that needs to be quickly solved. Similarly, the idiomatic expression ‘from head to heel’ (*od hlavy po päty*, slov.) is popular in Slovak, which expresses the completeness.

‘Achilles’ heel’ is one of the well-known and widely used idioms in many languages, thanks to its reference to Greek mythology – the character of the warrior Achilles. Due to the famous story, this fixed expression relates to a) a vulnerable spot, b) a weak spot, or a flaw. The heel has long been considered one of the most vulnerable parts of the body (since people often walked barefoot), which is also reflected in biblical imagery (and the serpent will strike his heel).

From an ethnolinguistic perspective,¹⁰ the given idiomatic unit realizes both the localization profile (mainly in the vertical), meaning the perception of the heel as the lowest,

⁹ N. Svilčić, P. Maldini, “Political Myths and Totalitarianism: An Anthropological Analysis of Their Causal Interrelationships,” *Collegium Antropologicum*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2014), p. 731.

¹⁰ These are concepts of cognitive linguistics. We use the theory of A. Wierzbicka (1985, 1996), J. Bartmiński (2010, 2016), in the Czech environment the inspiring works of I. Vaňková (2012), V. Vitkovská (2014) and others. In Slovakia, E. Smiešková (1984), D. Baláková (2011) and as part of her

bottom-most part of the human body, the part that touches the ground last when walking. In this sense, it is also associated with the functional profile, i.e., the provision of movement and stability (a person with an injured heel has trouble walking or standing). The transferred, metaphorical meaning of a vulnerable or weak heel (like Achilles') is, however, primarily realized in the gesture profile in contemporary communication. It is this potential of the transferred meaning of 'Achilles' heel' that we follow in the research of the contemporary Slovak public language, focusing on the societal context.¹¹

METHODS AND DATA

Our research is focused on the specific connection between corpus linguistics and sociocultural research. Since we are concerned with the vulnerability of democracy or identifying the weak/vulnerable points in Slovak society, we examine the idiom 'Achilles' heel' in two corpora. 1. In the corpus of written texts prim-10.0-public-inf (SNK public inf version 10.0, Size: 1,163,232,349 tags), and 2. In the temporally defined corpus of the SME newspaper from the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (01/2022 – 06/2023, Size: 34 473 536 tags).

Based on the collocations of the idiom in both corpora, we interpret and compare the various contexts. We assume that the use of the idiom 'Achilles' heel' reflects the weak spots in society and mirrors the changes taking place in the socio-political developments of Slovakia. For the research, we set the following research questions:

RQ1: What 'Achilles' heels' of Slovak society are reflected in journalistic texts?

RQ2: What weak/vulnerable spots ('Achilles' heels') of the democratic system and changes in the socio-political developments of Slovakia are captured in the period of the war in Ukraine (01/2022 – 06/2023)?

ANALYSIS AND DATA INTERPRETATION OF THE CORPUS OF JOURNALISTIC TEXTS

In the first corpus of journalistic texts: prim-10.0-public-inf (SNK public inf version 10.0, Size: 1,163,232,349 positions), the Achilles*12 lemma is found 780 times. The

dissertation by M. Pastorková. In Slovak linguistics we also mention the works by J. Krško (2020), V. Patráš (2018) and L. Ráčková (2023). The research is carried out on the basis of the analysis of conceptual profiles: appearance/ manifestation, localization, function and gesture.

¹¹ In the study, we do not monitor the use in the language of sports journalism, nor in literal contexts, e.g. within medical expressions, because there are mostly literal meanings.

¹² We set the search in all declension forms, as Slovak is an inflectional language. When you set up an Achilles heel lemma search, the occurrence results are the same. Search settings: in the range from: -5 to 5, minimum frequency in the corpus: 5, minimum frequency in the given range: 3.

specific collocations ‘Slovakia’ (23 co-occurrences) and ‘Slovak’ (27 co-occurrences). We find out that the ‘Slovak’ collocate is mentioned in connection with the ‘Achilles’ heel’ in the context of justice, economy (especially unemployment¹³ and management¹⁴), parliamentary elections,¹⁵ business in several selected areas (e.g. cheesemaking¹⁶), foreign policy (especially the so-called Hungarian question¹⁷), healthcare,¹⁸ economy,¹⁹ culture,²⁰ tourism (insufficient services),²¹ education²² (the quality of higher education).

In direct relation to democracy, Peter Schutz describes the ‘Achilles’ heel’ of our society in his article: *An unmistakable testimony that Slovak democracy has an Achilles heel somewhere, which distinguishes it from other national scenes, was issued by the European elections. By just participating. Thirteen percent participation is the bottom that erodes the very essence of the order in which we live. Power, delegated by a negligible minority of society, denies the constitutional idea of government by the people.*²³

In connection with the ‘Achilles’ heel’, a word ‘Slovakia’ is mentioned in connection with tax evasion²⁴ and the efficiency of tax collection,²⁵ dysfunctional infrastructure²⁶ (especially rail transport), unnecessary bureaucracy and obsolescence in education,²⁷ drawing of EU funds²⁸ and poor services (especially in tourism).²⁹ In one of articles, published in the mainstream daily SME, the words of respondents (first-time voters) are quoted. They consider to be the Slovak Achilles’ heel: *the unification of politicians,*

¹³ HN2006/01. Jana Mravcová: Prílev nových investícií by urýchlil dobiehanie Česka. Hospodárske noviny 2006/01.

¹⁴ UM2014/06. UM – úspešní manažéri 2014/06. Číslo dokumentu: 1473507.

¹⁵ DF2002/04. Optikou Aliancie. Číslo dokumentu: 281953 Domino. Fórum 2002/04

¹⁶ SME 1994/09. Jedzte syry! (prosia slovenskí syrári). Bez autora. Číslo dokumentu: 766243

¹⁷ NS2020/06. Sto rokov Trianonu. Číslo dokumentu: 1716714. Nové slovo 2020/06

¹⁸ TY2021/02. Téma týždňa: Rok pravdy. Číslo dokumentu: 1715977. Týždeň 2021/02

¹⁹ HN2012/12. Priemysel v roku 2012? Kľúčové boli pre nás autá. Číslo dokumentu: 1353808. Hospodárske noviny 2012/12

²⁰ MYTU 2010/14 Číslo dokumentu: 1276993. MY Turčianske noviny 2010/14

²¹ TY2011/24. Čo nás naučili majstrovstvá?. Číslo dokumentu: 1446251. Týždeň 2011/24

²² EP2010/03. Číslo dokumentu: 1466343. Extra plus 2010/03

²³ TY2014/23. Peter Schutz. .týždeň Číslo dokumentu: 1548187. Týždeň 2014/23. Text in Slovak language: Neklamné svedectvo, že slovenská demokracia má kdesi Achillovu pätu, ktorá ju odlišuje od iných národných scén, vydali eurovoľby. Samotnou účasťou. Trinásťpercentná účasť je dno, ktoré rozleptáva samotnú podstatu usporiadania, v ktorom žijeme. Moc, delegovaná zanedbateľnou menšinou spoločnosti, popiera konštitučnú ideu, ktorou je vláda ľudu.

²⁴ HN2013/01 Marcela Šimková: Papierovačky s daňovým priznaním na DPH sa skončia. Hospodárske noviny 2013/01

²⁵ HN2013/06 Ivan Szabó: Slabší rast a silnejšie dane. Hospodárske noviny 2013/06

²⁶ HN2011/01 Tomáš Vašuta: Miesto práce utierame žiarovky. Hospodárske noviny 2011/01

²⁷ HN2012/11 Marcela Šimková: Štát by mal odovzdať časť agendy súkromnému sektoru. Hospodárske noviny 2012/11

²⁸ EP 2013/10. Bez názvu. Bez autora. Číslo dokumentu: 1467910. Extra plus 2013/10

²⁹ SME 1997/01. Bez názvu. Bez autora. Číslo dokumentu: 233161.

*the first thing to do is to put order at home, put an end to corruption in university admission. Also, the first-time voters consider the lack of suitable job opportunities to be the most serious problem.*³⁰

ANALYSIS AND DATA INTERPRETATION OF THE TIME-LIMITED CORPUS (SME NEWSPAPER)

The occurrence of the lemma *heel* is 166 times (4.82 per million) in the corpus of SME texts 01/2022 – 06/2023.

Collocations 31 of lema *heel* are:

According to the number of co-occurrences	According Tscore ³²
to be (byť, slov.) (42)	head (hlava, slov.)
head (hlava, slov.) (40)	to be (byť, slov.)
Achilles* (Achillov*, slov.) (27)	Achillov* (Achillov*, slov.)
to have (mať, slov.) (24)	to have (mať, slov.)
not to have (nemať, slov.) (12)	not to have (nemať, slov.)
to step (šliapať, slov.) (11)	to step (šliapať, slov.)
Putin (Putin, slov.) (7)	Putin (Putin, slov.)

The table with the collocations indicates that the word 'heel' is very often found in the idiomatic units. At the same time, it also proves the high degree of collocability of the idiom 'Achilles' heel'. The results of the collocates are almost identical according to both functionalities (selected parameters) and indicate the most frequent phraseological units:

a) **To be on (someone's) heels/on their heels, or (even) to step on someone's heels (byť (niekomu) v päťách/za päťami, šliapať niekomu na päty, slov.)** – both phraseological units can be considered synonymous. They are predominantly used in a sports context, refer to a situation where someone is constantly chasing or being very close to someone. We confirm that given idioms are primarily related to the sports field, e.g.

³⁰ SME 2002/08. Voliť už budú aj tí, čo nepoznali totalitu. Bez autora. Číslo dokumentu: 178400. Text in Slovak language: 'zjednotenie politikov,' 'najskôr treba urobiť poriadok doma,' 'skoncovať s korupciou pri prijímaní na vysoké školy' atď.). *Za najzávažnejší problém považujú prvooliči nedostatok vhodných pracovných príležitostí.*

³¹ When setting lemma heel in the range from: -5 to 5, minimum frequency in the body: 3, minimum frequency in the given range: 3.

³² T-score is based on a statistical method of hypothesis testing and is sometimes referred to as a measure of contrast. The higher the T-score, the less likely it is to randomly distribute words, i.e. the probability of steady state combinations of words (collocations) increases. T-score also captures the frequency of grammatical units (which are usually more frequent than lexical combinations – we do not list these grammatical collocations).

‘For a long time, the home Thibaut Pinot was on his heel’;³³ ‘we will step on Trnava’s heels until the end of the competition.’³⁴ We found only one case that belongs to the context of current political events: *Putin has no time for trips and, moreover, he is annoyed when Russia must return hard-won cities to Ukraine. Not that Shoigu is not a careerist, but now he is quite monitored, and the secret police is stepping on his heels. He must not make a mistake.*³⁵

Thus, in a political context, this idiom can refer to intense surveillance or pressure, as in the case of Putin’s reaction to the surveillance of his minister. In the selected examples, we can see a reference to ‘stepping on the heels’ in the context of surveillance and persecution. This idiom in a political context can be a signal of repressive regimes where individuals or opposition voices are constantly monitored. Such behaviour can be dangerous for democratic values such as freedom of expression and political opposition.

b) **From head to heel (od hlavy po päty, slov.)** – it is a petrified Slovak phraseological unit that appears in the texts only in this form. It indicates something complete (in its entirety). We have identified 12 specific occurrences in the corpus, but only one of them is related to political/social events: *A number of videos show Ukrainian soldiers taking Russians captive, ordering them to take off their outer clothes and subjecting them to a body search from head to heel. After that, prisoners of war are covered and their hands are tied with military tape, the Kyiv Post wrote.*³⁶ The idiom ‘from head to heel’ in the context of prisoners of war may indicate violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, such as human dignity, during war conflicts.

c) **It has/doesn’t have a head and/or a heel (má/nemá (to) hlavu a/ani pätu, slov.)** – as you can see, the frequent phraseological unit also binds the collocates from the table, namely the verb to have (or its negative form: not to have). It is used to express ambiguity or lack of logic in something, especially in political and social discussions. Examples include politic statements about unrealistic or chaotic situations, such as ‘an idea has no head or heel.’ On the contrary, if something has a head and a heel, it’s good.

³³ SME 2022/07 Sportnet, TASR: V Alpách triumfoval únik, prvú horskú etapu nečakane vyhral Jungels.

³⁴ SME 2022/03 Sportnet, TASR: Taktický boj sa skončil bez gólov. Trnava zostala v tabuľke pred Ružomberkom.

³⁵ SME 2022/11 Petra Procházková: Kto príde po Putinovi? Isté je, že demokrat to nebude (píše Petra Procházková). Text in Slovak language: Putin nemá čas na výlety a navyše, rozčuluje ho, keď Rusko musí vracat’ Ukrajinu ťažko vybojované mestá. Niežeby Šojgu nebol karierista, ale teraz je dosť sledovateľný a tajná polícia mu šliape na päty. Nesmie urobiť chybu.

³⁶ ME 2023/06 Patrik Sopóci, Juraj Buch, SITA, TASR, ČTK: Ukrajina Rusko Online: USA nebudú Ukrajinu uľahčovať vstup do NATO, musí splniť rovnaké kritériá. Text in Slovak language: Množstvo videí zachytáva, ako ukrajinskí vojaci odvádzajú Rusov do zajatia, nariaďujú im vyzliecť si vrchné oblečenie a podrobujú ich telesnej prehliadke od hlavy po päty. Po nej vojnových zajatcov zakryjú a spútajú im ruky vojenskou páskou, napísal Kyiv Post.

The idiom is popularly used in political events as we can see in the following examples: 1) *I am convinced that the political debate can only benefit when real and existing issues are discussed, Sulík said after the meeting. What will have a head and a heel, we will support.*³⁷ 2) *On the other hand, the initial chaos is natural, because someone has to organize it at the beginning, and I think that after the first week it was quite having a head and a heel. When there was a war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, tens of thousands of people came here. In 2015, there was a migration crisis. Now it's 2022, we've known for months that there are tensions between Russia and Ukraine.*³⁸ 3) *Not a single euro went into its development during the entire period, and now you are coming up with something that is nice, but it has no head or heel.*³⁹ 4) *According to the head of For the People, Veronika Remišová, the proposal has no head or heel.*⁴⁰

The idiom appears in situations where political decisions or proposals, that are vague or incoherent, are discussed. Pointing out that something 'has no head and heel' can be a critical expression of the inability of governments or political actors to organize and manage state affairs effectively. If political decisions are ambiguous or chaotic, this can undermine trust in political institutions, which can undermine the stability of democratic processes.

THE ACHILLES' HEEL IN THE SLOVAK SOCIETY

Considering our research questions, we pay more attention to a key idiom in our study: the 'Achilles' heel'. As we mention (and the table proves it), it is also very popular in all communication spheres (in comments on sports, healthcare, education, economy, etc.). We can also find it in connection with political events. Examples: 1) *However, he considers a significant increase in vaccination rates to be the most important. Because this is our biggest handicap, our Achilles' heel, our blister," said the Prime Minister.*⁴¹ 2) *He*

³⁷ SME 2022/08 SME.SK, SITA. Sulík hovoril s Ficom o energetickej kríze, Šeliga stretnutie kritizoval. Text in Slovak: Som presvedčený, že politickej debate môže len a len prospieť, keď sa bude diskutovať o reálnych a existujúcich otázkach," uviedol po stretnutí Sulík „ Čo bude mať hlavu a pätu , my podporíme.

³⁸ SME 2022/03 Monika Sereková, Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová, Redakcia: Šéf migračného úradu Orlovský: Pre všetkých to bude veľká lekcia. Text in Slovak: Na druhej strane je ten počiatočný chaos prirodzený, pretože niekto to musí na začiatku organizovať a myslím, že po prvom týždni už to celkom malo hlavu a pätu. Keď bola v 90. rokoch vojna v Juhoslávii, prišli sem desiatitisíce ľudí. V roku 2015 bola migračná kríza. Teraz máme rok 2022, už mesiace vieme, že medzi Ruskom a Ukrajinou je napätie.

³⁹ SME 2022/01 Jana Ogurčáková: Trnka presadil prístavy za vyše milióna. Populizmus, reagujú poslanci. Text in Slovak: Do jej rozvoja nešlo za celé obdobie ani euro a teraz prichádzate s niečím, čo je síce milé , ale nemá to hlavu ani pätu.

⁴⁰ SME 2022/12 Jakub Habas, TASR Redakcia: Opozícia dáva dokopy hlasy na odvolanie vlády, koalícia za rozpočet. Text in Slovak: Podľa šéfky Za ľudí Veroniky Remišovej návrh nemá " hlavu ani pätu.

⁴¹ SME 2022/01 TASR. Heger apeluje na ľudí, aby si uvedomili aj ekonomickú hodnotu zaočkovanosti. Text in Slovak: Za najdôležitejšie však považuje výrazné zvýšenie zaočkovanosti. Lebo toto je náš najväčší hendikep, naša Achillova päta , náš otlak, vyhlásil premiér."

expressed the assumption that one or more groups could try to get concessions from Europe and take advantage of the increased arrival of migrants. The fact that it divides Europe so much is an Achilles' heel, the official said.⁴² 3) NATO's Achilles' heel.⁴³ 4) The Achilles' heel of the disinformation movement is an extensive interpretation of freedom of speech, which does not allow the fight against disinformation to be based on a paradigm shift, so to speak.⁴⁴ 5) However, dependence on Russia is becoming the Achilles' heel of an ambitious strategy. Putin's regime is throttling gas taps and endangering the filling of gas storage facilities for the winter months.⁴⁵ 6) Europe's largest economy's dependence on Russian energy has become its Achilles' heel as Western allies seek to punish Vladimir Putin for his attack on Ukraine.⁴⁶

An interesting fact is that the collocate *Putin* (primarily identified as the unit collocate of the heel) in all cases, it is tied exclusively to idiom 'Achilles' heel'. E.g. 1) *Not weapons, but our determination to use them is what Putin perceives how Achilles' heel of West.*⁴⁷ 2) *The stability of the bearings can be Putin's Achilles' heel.*⁴⁸ 3) *Russia no longer has many reserves. Putin's Achilles' heel.*⁴⁹ 4) *Putin's Achilles heel. Is it genocide and who is responsible for the murder?*⁵⁰

⁴² SME 2022/12 Washington Post, Chico Harlan, Stefano Pitrelli: Utečencov do Európy pribúda. Ak neutekajú pred vojnou, majú väčšinou smolu. Text in Slovak: Vyslovil domnienku, že jedna alebo viacero skupín by sa mohlo snažiť získať ústupky od Európy a využiť zvýšený príchod migrantov. „To, že to Európu tak rozdeľuje, je Achillova päta,“ povedal úradník.

⁴³ SME 2022/06 Lukáš Onderčanin: Achillova päta NATO. Rusko sa sporí s Litvou o dopravný koridor. Text in Slovak: Achillova päta NATO.

⁴⁴ SME 2023/02 Peter Schutz: Snahy obmedziť dezinformovanie vo verejnom priestore sú zagulacovanie štvorca (komentár). Text in Slovak: Achillovou päťou dezinformačného hnutia je extenzívna interpretácia slobody slova, ktorá neumožňuje založiť boj s dezinformáciami na takpovediac paradigmatickej zmene.

⁴⁵ SME 2022/06 Jozef Tvardzík: Nenávidené uhlie je späť. Jeho návrat podporujú najzelenšie krajiny. Text in Slovak: Závislosť od Ruska sa však stáva Achillovou päťou ambiciózneho stratégie. Putinov režim škrtí plynové kohútiky a ohrozuje plnenie plynových zásobníkov na zimné mesiace.

⁴⁶ SME 2022/05 TASR: Nemecko dosiahlo pokrok pri znižovaní dodávok energií z Ruska. Text in Slovak: Závislosť najväčšej európskej ekonomiky od ruskej energie sa stalo jej Achillovou päťou, keď sa západní spojenci snažia potrestať Vladimira Putina za jeho útok na Ukrajinu.

⁴⁷ SME 2022/07. Tomáš Valášek: O bezpečnosti Európy sa rozhoduje na Ukrajine, nie v Madride. Text in Slovak: Nie zbrane, ale naše odhodlanie použiť ich je to, čo Putin vníma ako Achillovu päťu Západu.

⁴⁸ SME 2022/04. Jozef Tvardzík: Koniec ruského plynu? Potrebujeme jeden tanker týždenne. Text in Slovak: Stabilita ložísk môže byť Achillovou päťou Putina.

⁴⁹ SME 2022/04 Nina Sobotovičová: Zbrane z 19. storočia a voda z rybníka. Branci z Donbasu sa sťažujú na podmienky. Text in Slovak: Rusko už nemá veľa rezerv. Achillova päta Putina.

⁵⁰ SME 2022/04 Matúš Krčmárik, Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová, Redakcia: Ukrajinský spravodaj: Vraždenie v Buči spustilo súboj propagand. Text in Slovak: Achillova päta Putina. Je to genocída a kto je za vraždenie zodpovedný?

CONCLUSION

A comparison of analyses based on data from corpora indicates a significant shift in the definition of weaknesses in Slovak society and democracy. While the first (larger) corpus of written journalistic texts indicates a wider range of such vulnerabilities in Slovak society, emphasizing economic parameters, political factors, but also transport, education, services, etc., the war events (the second corpus) attribute the 'Achilles' heel' in Slovakia to the issues of migration, vaccination and political diplomacy. An interesting finding is the fact that the central figure of the war events, Putin (in the time-limited corpus of the SME daily), is usually associated with this idiom. Figuratively, therefore, it can be stated that Putin is usually in the background of situations named as the 'Achilles' heel'. In this context, these are often situations: the spread of disinformation, energy and economic crisis, genocide, etc.

To answer RQ1 and RQ2, we confirm that all the idioms, containing the word 'heel', in political and social contexts, highlight aspects that can be considered as threats to the stability of democratic systems, whether in the areas of freedoms, justice, political transparency or security. The journalistic texts demonstrate the gradual revelation of the weaknesses of democratic systems, which can be described as their 'Achilles' heels'. Like the ancient myth of Achilles, which had its only weakness, democracy in Slovakia and other regions faces its own vulnerabilities that threaten its stability. From populism and polarization to corruption, from centralized decision-making to the growing power of economic and political elites. All these factors point to the fact that democratic processes are constantly exposed to threats that need to be solved, or else they can lead to the collapse of the system, just as Achilles' own vulnerability led to its downfall.

From the ethnolinguistic point of view, it can be stated that all identified idioms were used in their standard figurative meaning in the monitored corpora. We do not identify any semantic shifts or 'deviations' from traditional form and content. Of the profiles, the most implemented function is ('to be on someone's heels,' 'to step on someone's heels') and localization together with a gesture ('Achilles' heel,' 'from head to heel,' 'has/does not have a head and/or a heel').

At the same time, research proves a clichéd preference for a popular idiom ('Achilles' heel'), while many others remain in the background in terms of use in journalism (e.g. 'He doesn't even have it in his heel,' 'he turns on his heel,' 'it burns under his heels'⁵¹).

We consider the high degree of adaptability of the monitored idiom in new contexts to be a positive fact, which also underlines the expressive trend in commenting on serious social topics in journalism. We have been noticing this trend in the Slovak environment in the media for a long time.

⁵¹ Slovak translation: *Nemá to ani v päte, zvrtnúť sa na päte, horí mu pod päťami.*

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