



Abies nordmanniana and *Picea orientalis* forests from the Colchic region (Western Caucasus) and new concept of Euxine dark coniferous forests classification in the Braun-Blanquet system

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ABSTRACT

A classification system of the Colchic spruce-fir forests (the Western Caucasus) was developed using the Braun-Blanquet method. Two new associations *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.**, *Pruno laucerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.** and new alliance *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae* **all. nov.** were proposed after the comparative syntaxonomic analysis of dark coniferous forests from the Euxine province. Diagnostic species of the alliance are *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Actaea spicata*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dentaria bulbifera*, *Dryopteris carthusiana*, *D. filix-mas*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Impatiens noli-tangere*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Paris incompleta*, *Polystichum aculeatum*, *Ranunculus grandiflorus*, *Rubus caucasicus*, *Salvia glutinosa*, *Symphytum grandiflorum*. All described Colchic associations and alliance were placed in the order *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019 and the class *Asaro europaei–Abietetea sibiricae* Ermakov et al. in Willner et al. 2016 uniting West Palearctic dark coniferous subnemoral forests from Europe, Asia Minor, Southern Urals and Western Siberia.

Keywords: dark coniferous forests, *Abies nordmanniana*, *Picea orientalis*, classification, Braun-Blanquet, Colchis, Caucasus

РЕЗЮМЕ

Ермаков Н.Б., Плугатарь Ю.В., Лейба В.Д. Леса *Abies nordmanniana* и *Picea orientalis* из Колхидского региона (Западный Кавказ) и новая концепция классификации эвксинских темнохвойных лесов в системе Брауна-Бланке. Классификационная система елово-пихтовых лесов Колхиды (Западный Кавказ) разработана с использованием метода Браун-Бланке. Две новые ассоциации: *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.**, *Pruno laucerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.**, и новый союз *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae* **all. nov.** предложены в результате сравнительного синтаксономического анализа темнохвойных лесов Эвксинской провинции. Диагностические виды союза: *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Actaea spicata*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dentaria bulbifera*, *Dryopteris carthusiana*, *D. filix-mas*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Impatiens noli-tangere*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Paris incompleta*, *Polystichum aculeatum*, *Ranunculus grandiflorus*, *Rubus caucasicus*, *Salvia glutinosa*, *Symphytum grandiflorum*. Все описанные колхидские ассоциации и союзы отнесены к порядку *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019 и классу *Asaro europaei–Abietetea sibiricae* Ermakov et al. in Willner et al. 2016, объединяющему темнохвойные субнеморальные леса Западной Палеарктики (Европы, Малой Азии, Южного Урала и Западной Сибири).

Ключевые слова: темнохвойные леса, *Abies nordmanniana*, *Picea orientalis*, классификация, Браун-Бланке, Колхида, Кавказ

Colchis is a special geographical region of the Western Caucasus with an ultra-humid climate and is one of the vegetation diversity centers in the eastern sub-Mediterranean (Euxine province). Dark coniferous forests dominated by *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* are a characteristic elements of the upper part of the forest belt where they occupy the coldest and humid sites. In addition, fir and spruce forests are found throughout the Western Caucasus, as well as on the northern slopes of the mountain ridges of Northern Anatolia in Turkey where *Abies nordmanniana* is represented by a special form of *A. nordmanniana* subsp. *bornmuelleriana*. Until now, information on the phytocenotic diversity of fir and spruce-fir forests in the Western Caucasus is very poorly represented in the available literature. Most of these sources

lack complete data on the floristic peculiarities of forest communities as well as geobotanical relevés. There are only two papers (Korotkov & Belonovskaya 1987, Frantsuzov 2006) devoted to the classification of dark coniferous forests of the Caucasus using the Braun-Blanquet approach. The first publication represents a manuscript where 3 associations and 4 subassociations of dark coniferous forests from the Northern and Western Caucasus (outside the study area) were combined into one alliance *Abieti nordmannianae–Fagion orientalis* Korotkov et Belonovskaja 1987 nom. nud. [Art. 1]. This alliance was later downgraded to the suballiance *Abieti nordmannianae–Fagion orientalis* Korotkov et Belonovskaja 2021 nom nud. [Art. 3f] and included in the alliance *Fagion orientalis* Soó 1964 of the order *Rhododendro pontici–Fagetalia*

orientalis Passarge 1981 of the class *Carpino-Fagetea sylvaticae* Jakucs ex Passarge 1968 (syn. *Quervo-Fagetea* Br.-Bl. et Vlieger in Vlieger 1937). Three associations of dark coniferous forests from the Belaya River basin (the northern periphery of Colchis in the north-western Caucasus) were described by Frantsuzov (2006). These associations were also included in the alliance *Abieti nordmannianae-Fagion orientalis*. In the “Vegetation of Europe...” (Mucina et al. 2016), the dark coniferous forests of the Euxine province were not presented as an independent highest category. Quézel et al. (1980, 1992), Eminağaoğlu et al. (2007), Aksoy et al. (2012) described a number of dark coniferous forest associations dominated by *Abies nordmanniana* subsp. *bornmuelleriana* and *Picea orientalis* from Northern Anatolia. All of them were included in the class *Quervo-Fagetea* (order *Pino sylvestris-Piceetalia orientalis* Quézel et al. 1992 nom. inval. [Art. 5]). However, in the latest publication of Çoban & Willner (2019) on Northwestern Anatolia, another concept suggesting the position of the Euxine dark coniferous forests in the *Vaccinio-Piceetea* (all. *Lonicero caucasicae-Piceion orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019, ord. *Abieti nordmannianae-Piceetalia orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019) was proposed. These researchers followed the opinion that the distinct physiognomic feature – the predominance of dark coniferous species of the genera *Abies* and *Picea*, does not allow to combine these forests into the same higher category with broadleaved ones. At present, the question of the position of dark coniferous forests dominated by *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* in the higher units system remains under discussion.

The main purpose of this paper is to present the results of classification of coniferous forests dominated by *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* from the northern part of Colchis (the western part of the Greater Caucasus mountains) and demonstrate a new concept of the position of the Euxine dark coniferous subnemoral forests in the syntaxonomic system of Eurasia.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study area

The study area (Fig. 1) is located on the southern slope of the western part of the Greater Caucasus Mts (Bzyb River basin, Abkhazia) within the Ritsa National Park. Altitudes of 1100–2300 m prevail there. The mountain ranges are composed mainly of ancient crystalline rocks – gneisses, crystalline schists and granites. The relief is characterized by very steep mountain slopes with weak erosion processes, open outcrops and narrow river valleys (Kamanin et al. 1974, Antonov et al. 1977). Dark coniferous forests are widespread in the upper part of the forest belt at altitudes 1200–1900 m. The climate at an altitude of about 1600 m is moderately cold and very humid. The average annual temperature is 5.2°C. The average temperature of the warmest month (August) is 14–16°C, the coldest month (January) is -2– -5°C. Winter lasts 4–5 months a year but high snow cover lasts longer. The high climate humidity is provided by active Mediterranean cyclones throughout the western part of the Caucasus. The average annual precipitation is 1000–1500 mm (Gvozdetsky 1963, Grebenshchikov 1974). Snow cover reaches 4 meters in winter (Tephnadze et al.

2014). According to the Achishko meteorological station closest to the research area, located at the upper border of the forest belt, the average annual temperature is +5°C, the average temperature of the warmest month (August) is +12.9°C, the coldest month (January) is -5°C, the average annual precipitation is 3200 mm. The *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* forests are formed in a various habitats (very steep and gentle slopes of mountains of different aspects, often with outcrops of indigenous crystalline bedrocks and moderately developed soils).

Sampling and classification

The classification and comparative syntaxonomic analysis were based on 51 relevés made on plots of 10×10 m in size in forests dominated by *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* with a total cover of coniferous trees more than 65 %. Of this series of data, 31 relevés were made by the authors on the south-western part of the Greater Caucasus in the basin of the river Auadkhara (a tributary of the Lashipsa River, the upper reaches of the Bzyb River basin, the Republic of Abkhazia), on the territory of the Ritsa National Park. Additionally, for a comparative analysis at regional scale, 20 relevés of dark coniferous forests (associations *Festuco drymejae-Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 and *Petasito albae-Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006) from the adjacent north-western part of the Greater Caucasus were taken from the paper by Frantsuzov (2006). Thus, the entire data set of relevés selected for regional syntaxonomic analysis represents a sub-meridional geographic transect crossing the Greater

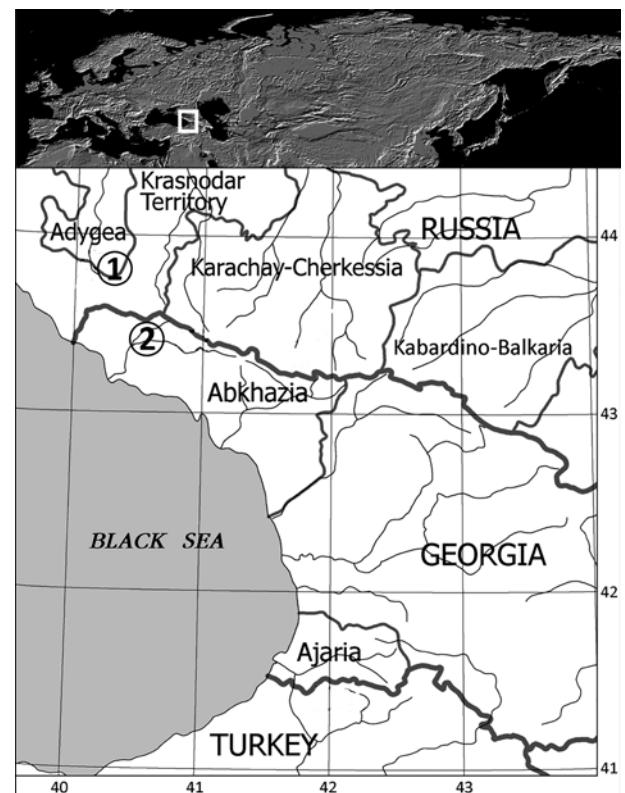


Figure 1 Geographical locations (circled numbers) of relevés used for the syntaxonomic analysis: 1 – the upper part of the Belaya River Basin (North-Western Caucasus) (Frantsuzov 2006), 2 – study site of Nikolai Ermakov and Vitaliy Leiba in the Auadkhara River Basin, Abkhazia (Western Caucasus)

Caucasus and demonstrates a various dark coniferous forests habitats along altitudinal and topographic gradients in the northern part of the Colchic province.

Input of vegetation data was performed using a TURBOVEG database (Hennekens & Schaminée 2001). The data were exported to JUICE 7.0 (Tichý & Holt 2006) where every tree species from the first and second tree layer, as well as from the shrub and herb layers, were combined. All taxa only determined at the genus level were excluded from the analysis. The classification of the entire set of relevés was carried out in accordance with the Braun-Blanquet approach (Westhoff & Maarel 1978). Quantitative classification of relevés was performed using cluster analysis (Ward method, Euclidian distance) implemented in the Statistica – 6.0 software. New syntaxa were described in accordance with the International Code of Phytosociological Nomenclature (Theurillat et al. 2021).

At the second stage of the classification procedure, a comparative geographical syntaxonomic analysis of the Colchic dark coniferous forests with syntaxa of similar communities described from other regions of the Western and North Caucasus (Korotkov & Belonovskaya 1987), as well as with dark coniferous forests from Northwestern Anatolia was performed. The data from Turkish part of the dark coniferous forest range were taken from Çoban & Willner (2020, Electronic supplement S3). The final synoptic table of 20 Euxine associations and subassociations with equal-interval constancy values (1–5) was used for cluster analysis (Word method, Euclidian distance). A species was considered diagnostic for a unit if the constancy in the target unit was at least twice as high as in any other unit of the same rank.

We followed Czerepanov (1995) for vascular plants and Ignatov et al. (2006) for bryophytes taxonomy.

RESULTS

The quantitative classification of the entire series of 51 relevés showed clear floristic and ecological-geographical differences between the syntaxa of dark coniferous forests at the level of associations (Fig. 2). Two distinct clusters (1 and 2, Fig. 3) correspond to the associations *Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 and *Festuco drymejae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 described by

Frantuzov (2006) on the northern slope of the Main Caucasian Range near the north-western border of the dark coniferous forests distribution in the Caucasus. The other two clusters (3 and 4, Fig. 3) forming a separate branch on the dendrogram represent two new associations of dark coniferous forests from southern macro-slope of the western part of the Main Caucasian Ridge.

Ass. *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov. hoc loco (cluster 3, Figs 2A,B, 3)

Diagnostic species: *Dryopteris caucasica*, *D. dilatata*, *D. expansa*, *Trachystemon orientalis*, *Euphorbia macroceras*, *Dentaria quinquefolia*, *Circaea alpina*, *Vicia crocea*, *Ruscus colchicus*, *Carex sylvatica*, *Cardamine pectinata*.

Holotypus: relevé 18 in Tables 1, 1a. Field relevé Nr. is 31NE17

These are typical Colchic fir and spruce-fir forests widespread on the southern macro-slope of the Western part of the Main Caucasian Range (the Audhara River basin). They occupy the steep mountain slopes of various aspects in the upper part of forest belt at altitudes of 1290–1800 m. The underlying rocks are crystalline and soils are usually moderately developed and slightly stony.

The tree layer is well developed (cover 60–80 %, height 34–60 m). *Abies nordmanniana* (rarely *Picea orientalis*) absolutely predominates in the first sublayer. *Fagus orientalis* is often found there but with lower cover values (10–20 %). The second sublayer (cover 10–30 %, height 14–18 m) is also dominated by *Abies nordmanniana*. The shrub layer has a cover 10–25 % and height 1.2–4 m. It is formed by *Rubus caucasicus*, evergreen species (*Vaccinium arctostaphylos*, *Ilex colchica*), as well as *Ulmus glabra* and undergrowth of *Abies nordmanniana*, *Picea orientalis*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*. The herb layer (with a cover 40–60 % and average height 30–45 cm) is dominated by mesophilous ferns (*Dryopteris caucasica*, *D. dilatata*, *D. carthusiana*, *D. expansa*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Athyrium filix-femina*), as well as nemoral Caucasian and Euxine species – *Trachystemon orientalis*, *Euphorbia macroceras*, *Dentaria quinquefolia*, *Circaea alpina*, *Ruscus colchicus*, *Carex sylvatica*. It distinguishes these forests from other Colchic and Euxine associations. The moss cover is not developed.

Ass. *Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov. hoc loco (cluster 4, Figs 2C,D, 3).

Diagnostic species: *Prunus laurocerasus*, *Taxus baccata*, *Rhododendron luteum*, *Euonymus latifolia*, *Sorbus boissieri*, *Tilia bego-*



Figure 2 Dark coniferous subnemoral forests of the association *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov. (A and B) from the Western part of the Main Caucasian Range (the Audhara river basin) and dark coniferous subnemoral forests with evergreen shrub layer – *Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov. (C and D), from the Western part of the Main Caucasian Range (the Lashipsa river basin)

Table 1. Continued.

Relevé nr.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32				
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	t2	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	.	.	1	1	.	2	.	1	.	.	1	.	.	1	.	1	.	+	.	1	2	II	III		
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	s1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	1	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	2	.	1	.	2	I	II	
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	2	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	II	
<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	ml	.	.	.	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	+	+	.	+	.	+	.	+	.	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	1	1	II	II		
<i>Plagiothecium denticulatum</i>	ml	.	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	+	1	.	+	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	II	
<i>Acer laetum</i>	s1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	1	.	+	1	.	.	.	.	I	II	
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	s1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	1	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	1	1	.	1	.	.	.	I	II	
<i>Tilia begoniifolia</i>	s1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Hylacomium splendens</i>	ml	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II
<i>Comallaria majalis</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II
<i>Carex digitata</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II
<i>Geranium gracile</i>	hl	.	+	1	1	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	.	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Cicerbita petiolata</i>	hl	.	+	.	+	+	.	+	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	1	.	1	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	hl	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	1	+	.	+	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Ranunculus cappadocicus</i>	hl	2	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	.	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Sedum stoloniferum</i>	hl	.	+	II	.
<i>Plagiommium ellipticum</i>	ml	2	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	I
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	s1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Aristolochia iberica</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Polystichum aculeatum</i>	hl	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	II

Rare species: *Acer campestre* t2 – 4(1), *A. campestre* hl – 19(+), *A. laetum* t2 – 27(1), 29(+), *A. pseudoplatanus* hl – 9(+), *A. trautvetteri* s1 – 17(1), *Aruncus vulgaris* hl – 1(+), 4(+), 9(1), 17(+), *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum* hl – 14(+), *A. trichomanes* hl – 30(+), *Athyrium distentifolium* hl – 17(+), *Calamintha sylvatica* hl – 15(+), *Cardamine* sp. hl – 2(+), 9(+), *Carex divulsa* hl – 15(+), *Carpinus betulus* s1 – 27(1), *Castanea sativa* t2 – 14(1), *C. sativa* s1 – 14(+), *Cicerbita prenanthoides* hl – 15(+), *Cladonia* sp. ml – 31(+), *Cornus mas* s1 – 28(1), 31(1), *Corylus avellana* s1 – 9(+), 15(1), *Cotinus coggygria* s1 – 27(1), *Dryopteris remota* hl – 8(+), 10(+), 11(+), *Duchesnea indica* hl – 3(+), *Epilobium montanum* hl – 2(+), 8(+), 17(+), *Epipogium aphyllum* hl – 3(+), *Frangula alnus* s1 – 27(+), *Galium* sp. hl – 16(+), 18(+), *G. valantoides* hl – 16(+), *Gentiana schistocalyx* hl – 1(+), 6(+), 7(+), *Geum urbanum* hl – 17(+), *Goodyera repens* hl – 31(+), 32(+), *Hedera colchica* s1 – 13(2), *Listera cordata* hl – 1(+), *Lonicera caprifolium* s1 – 32(+), *L. orientalis* s1 – 24(1), *Luzula forsteri* hl – 11(+), *Lysimachia punctata* hl – 17(+), *Marchantia polymorpha* ml – 10(+), *Maiuccia struthiopteris* hl – 9(+), *Melampyrum arvense* hl – 17(+), *Melica uniflora* hl – 15(+), 16(+), *Milium effusum* hl – 5(+), *Mycelis muralis* hl – 13(+), *Myosotis amoena* hl – 1(+), 2(+), *Oreopteris limbosperma* hl – 6(+), 8(2), 18(2), *Orthilia secunda* hl – 27(+), 29(+), *Ostrya carpinifolia* s1 – 23(1), 29(1), *Peltigera* sp. ml – 24(+), *Phegopteris connectilis* hl – 1(+), 2(+), 6(1), 7(1), *Phyllitis scolopendrium* hl – 26(+), *Pinus kochiana* t1 – 31(+), *Plagiommium* sp. ml – 2(+), *Polystichum braunii* hl – 13(+), *Potentilla micrantha* hl – 1(+), 2(+), 6(+), 22(+), *Pyrola rotundifolia* hl – 1(+), *Quercus iberica* s1 – 26(+), *Ranunculus grandiflorus* hl – 15(+), *Rhododendron ponticum* s1 – 24(1), *Ribes biebersteinii* s1 – 30(1), *Sambucus nigra* hl – 9(+), *Saxifraga* sp. hl – 10(+), *Senecio nemorensis* (s.l.) hl – 3(+), 4(+), 5(+), 20(+), *Solidago virgaurea* hl – 5(+), 27(+), *Sorbus torminalis* s1 – 26(+), *Sorbus velutina* s1 – 31(+), *Stachys sylvatica* hl – 15(+), *Symphytum asperum* hl – 2(+), *Tamus communis* hl – 12(+), 13(+), *Taxus baccata* hl – 26(+), *Tragopogon orientalis* hl – 3(2), *Vaccinium myrtillus* hl – 31(+), *Veronica gentianoides* hl – 17(+), *Viola odorata* hl – 15(+), 16(+).

nifolia, *Polygonatum glaberrimum*, *Swida australis*, *Brachythecium salebrosum*, *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Pterigynandrum filiforme*.

Holotypus: relevé 28 in Tables 1, 1a. Field relevé nr. is 73NE18.

The association is less widespread than the previous one. It occurs on stony substrates on steep (12–25°) mountain slopes of southern, southeastern, southwestern aspects at the altitudes of 950–1300 m. The soils are poorly developed and stony.

The tree layer has a cover 55–70 % and height 31–52 m. The first layer is dominated by *Abies nordmanniana*, the co-dominant is *Picea orientalis*. Broadleaved tree species (*Tilia begoniifolia*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*) and sometimes *Pinus kochiana* are rare. The second layer (a height 12–17 m, cover 15–20 %) consists of *Taxus baccata*, *Abies nordmanniana*, *Picea orientalis*, *Fagus orientalis*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *A. laetum*, *Tilia begoniifolia*. An evergreen liana (*Hedera colchica*) is also often found there.

A characteristic feature of the association is a dense shrub layer (a cover 55 – 80 %, height 1.2–2 m) formed by species characteristic of the association – *Prunus laurocerasus*, *Ilex colchica*, *Vaccinium arctostaphylos*, *Rhododendron luteum*, *Euonymus latifolia*, *Sorbus boissieri*, *Swida australis*. The closed shrub layer results in heavy shading and therefore the poor herb layer has cover only 1–8 %. A well-developed moss layer covering 5–40 % of the soil surface and boulders in large

patches is also a characteristic feature of the association. It is dominated by *Hypnum cupressiforme*, *Brachythecium salebrosum*, *Plagiommium undulatum*, *Pterigynandrum filiforme*, and boreal mosses – *Pleurozium schreberi* and *Dicranum scoparium*.

At the second stage of the classification, the quantitative cluster and comparative syntaxonomic analyzes of 20 syntaxa (taking into account the species constancy values) of *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* forests described from geographically neighboring regions of the North and Western Caucasus, as well as from Northwestern Anatolia

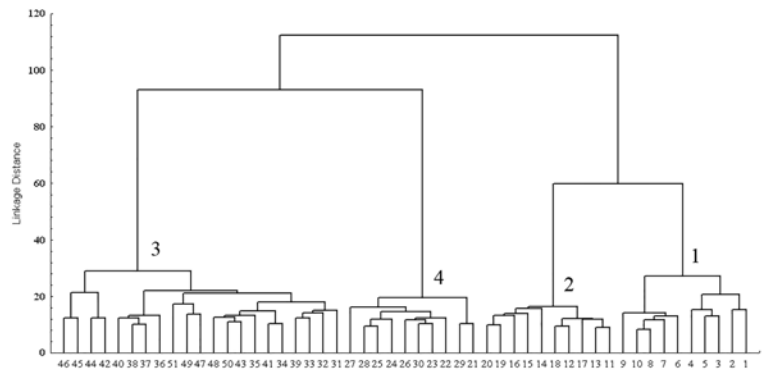


Figure 3 Results of cluster analysis (Ward method, Euclidian distance) of 51 relevés of the dark coniferous forests from the north-west part of Colchis. Associations: 1 – *Petasito albae*-*Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006, 2 – *Festuco drymejae*-*Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006, 3 – *Dryopterido caucasicae*-*Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov., 4 – *Pruno laurocerasi*-*Abietetum nordmannianae* ass. nov.

Table 1a. Header data of relevés of the associations *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.** and *Pruno lauro-cerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.** represented in table 1 (rel. 1–32). In the top line: 1 – relevé number, 2 – field relevé nr., 3 – date, 4 – altitude (m, a.s.l.), 5 – aspect (degrees), 6 – slope (degrees), 7 – cover tree layer (%), 8 – cover shrub layer (%), 9 – cover herb layer (%), 10 – cover moss layer (%), 11 – height (highest) trees (m), 12 – height lowest trees (m), 13 – height (highest) shrubs (m), 14 – height lowest shrubs (m), 15 – aver. height (high) herbs (cm), 16 – latitude, 17 – longitude.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	36NE17	03.08.2017	1644	150	7	70	18	60	15	34	16	4	2	18	43°31'34.6"	40°37'23.5"
2	37NE17	03.08.2017	1670	10	12	60	15	60	10	34	14	4	1.8	30	43°31'34.8"	40°37'19.1"
3	33NE17	03.08.2017	1650	180	35	75	15	50	0	34	14	3	1.6	30	43°30'22.1"	40°39'30.4"
4	34NE17	03.08.2017	1690	210	8	80	15	45	10	45	15	2	1.1	30	43°30'24.7"	40°39'31.1"
5	35NE17	03.08.2017	1748	240	30	70	10	55	15	40	14	3	1.2	25	43°30'27.8"	40°39'33.8"
6	41NE17	04.08.2017	1328	360	15	75	25	45	5	40	19	4	1.8	25	43°29'02.3"	40°37'48.6"
7	42NE17	04.08.2017	1400	360	32	75	15	55	35	36	14	3	1.6	25	43°28'59.7"	40°38'19.1"
8	43NE17	04.08.2017	1552	90	30	65	15	45	15	42	16	25	1.8	25	43°30'13.6"	40°40'05.8"
9	38NE17	03.08.2017	1353	350	7	80	15	45	10	38	15	4	1.8	25	43°29'06.4"	40°37'12.8"
10	39NE17	04.08.2017	1330	330	8	70	20	40	15	40	13	4	2	25	43°29'08.2"	40°37'04.7"
11	40NE17	04.08.2017	1291	25	15	70	20	40	30	43	15	4	1.5	25	43°29'13.8"	40°37'04.5"
12	87NE18	02.08.2018	995	210	15	65	10	40	0	42	16	1.4	0.9	25	43°29'20.6"	40°32'19.1"
13	88NE18	02.08.2018	1033	190	18	60	15	65	0	42	14	1.8	1.3	25	43°29'18.3"	40°32'24.8"
14	86NE18	02.08.2018	992	185	60	65	15	20	0	36	16	1.6	0.9	25	43°29'18.1"	40°32'14.7"
15	77NE18	01.08.2018	1162	220	17	60	15	60	0	52	14	2.4	1.3	20	43°28'27.6"	40°31'10.8"
16	78NE18	01.08.2018	1154	180	7	60	7	70	0	46	14	1.5	1	25	43°28'26.5"	40°31'18.3"
17	69NE18	31.07.2018	1530	240	5	80	10	65	0	52	18	1.2	0	12	43°29'32.7"	40°39'52.8"
18	31NE17	03.08.2017	1673	130	35	75	15	45	0	60	12	2	1.4	30	43°30'26.2"	40°40'59.7"
19	32NE17	03.08.2017	1581	190	18	80	7	45	0	38	14	2	1.1	30	43°30'17.6"	40°39'28.9"
20	30NE17	03.08.2017	1662	90	8	75	10	50	0	45	12	4	1.4	25	43°30'23.8"	40°39'56.3"
21	147NE19	30.07.2019	1390	330	45	80	15	25	0	30	15	1.8	0.9	25	43°29'36.5"	40°35'57.2"
22	29NE17	03.08.2017	1430	200	20	80	18	20	0	45	17	2	0.8	30	43°30'15.4"	40°39'49.2"
23	75NE18	01.08.2018	1268	40	20	55	75	8	0	43	17	2	1.3	12	43°28'30.6"	40°30'36.3"
24	74NE18	01.08.2018	1311	300	12	50	70	5	0	40	17	2	1.2	14	43°28'30.2"	40°30'41.6"
25	76NE18	01.08.2018	1265	110	25	55	80	4	0	34	17	2.3	1.2	14	43°28'28.2"	40°30'35.1"
26	90NE18	2018.08.03	956	350	25	65	60	10	0	35	16	2	1.4	15	43°28'25.5"	40°32'17.4"
27	89NE18	2018.08.03	971	30	30	70	55	7	0	41	16	2	1.2	17	43°28'26.8"	40°32'20.4"
28	73NE18	01.08.2018	1259	270	12	50	75	4	0	40	14	2	1.4	17	43°28'29.7"	40°30'44.8"
29	70NE18	01.08.2018	1226	150	7	55	75	3	0	52	18	2.2	1.2	12	43°28'25.4"	40°30'52.2"
30	67NE18	30.07.2018	1251	180	25	70	70	4	0	27	17	2.3	1.6	20	43°28'25.9"	40°30'22.9"
31	72NE18	01.08.2018	1200	180	18	60	85	1	0	30	12	2	1.1	15	43°28'24.3"	40°30'52.7"
32	71NE18	01.08.2018	1193	100	15	60	80	4	0	31	14	2	1.1	15	43°28'24.6"	40°30'51.1"

were carried out. The resulting dendrogram (Fig. 4) demonstrates the grouping of the entire series of the Euxine dark coniferous forests associations into two distinct higher rank categories showing mainly geographical patterns. Group A unites the Northwestern Anatolian syntaxa of *Abies nordmanniana* subsp. *bornmuelleriana*, *Picea orientalis* forests, and group B includes Caucasian syntaxa of *Abies nordmanniana*, *Picea orientalis* forests. This clear geographical principle of dividing all syntaxa observed in the dendrogram (Fig. 4) is disturbed by two associations – the West Euxine *Telekio speciosae–Piceetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992 and the Caucasian *Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 which merged into one separate B1 cluster. In fact, the combination of these two associations into one cluster is not accidental. Both of them represent subalpine fir forests occurring in different regions at higher altitudes, and both of these associations are characterized by the participation of a common group of subalpine species including tall-forbs (*Aconitum orientale*, *Aquilegia olympica*, *Astrantia maxima*, *Geranium sylvaticum*, *Symphytum asperum*). However, at present, there is not enough data to combine these forests into a special syntaxonomic category. Therefore, the synoptic table of the Euxine dark coniferous forests syntaxa (Table 2) was built in accordance with the geographical principle of dividing all syntaxa set into Caucasian and Northwestern Anatolian clearly observed in the dendrogram (Fig. 4). An analysis of the floristic compositions of all syntaxa

represented in this synoptic table (Table 2) showed that the main floristic originality of the Colchic fir forests and their differences from the forests of Northwestern Anatolia is determined by two species groups. The first group demonstrates geographical peculiarities and includes endemic plants of the Caucasian mountain system (*Paris incompleta*, *Rubus caucasicus*, *Ranunculus grandiflorus*, *Symphytum grandiflorum*). The second species group characterizes ecological features of the Colchic forests and consists of the widespread European and European-Siberian plants occurring in moist broad-leaved and dark coniferous subnival forests (*Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Actaea spicata*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Dentaria bulbifera*, *Dryopteris carthusiana*, *D. filix-mas*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Impatiens noli-tangere*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Polystichum aculeatum*, *Salvia glutinosa*). These mesophilous species indicate more humid climate of the Colchic part of Euxine dark coniferous forests range compared to similar forests in Northwestern Anatolia. In contrast, the dark coniferous forests of Northwestern Anatolia differ from the Colchic forests in the presence and high frequency of more drought-resistant Euxine, European and Eurasian species: *Pinus kochiana*, *Aremonia agrimonoides*, *Cardamine impatiens*, *Cyclamen coum*, *Daphne pontica*, *Dryopteris liliana*, *Lathyrus laxiflorus*, *Lapsana communis*, *Lonicera orientalis*, *Luzula pilosa*, *Poa nemoralis*, *Ranunculus cappadocicus*, *Sedum stoloniferum*, *Veronica officinalis*.

Table 2. Synoptic table of Euxinian dark-coniferous forests.

Syntaxon Nr.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Ass. <i>Festuco drymejae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> Frantsuzov 2006																				
<i>Mycelis muralis</i>	V	I	III	I	III	II				I	II	I		I		II	I			
<i>Solidago virgaurea</i>	V	I	II		III	II	II	I			IV	I		I	III	I				
Ass. <i>Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> ass. nov.																				
<i>Dryopteris caucasica</i>		V						III												
<i>Trachystemon orientalis</i>		V	II	I		I		I		I	I	I		I		I				
<i>Euphorbia macroceras</i>		IV	II				I													
<i>Dentaria quinquefolia</i>		IV																		
<i>Ruscus colchicus</i>		III						II	I	I				I						
<i>Cardamine pectinata</i>		III		II	I															
<i>Symphytum grandiflorum</i>	I	III	I		I		I													
<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>	I	III	I										II		I	I	I			
<i>Vicia crocea</i>		III										IV			I					
Ass. <i>Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> Frantsuzov 2006																				
<i>Aconitum orientale</i>			V			II	II	I												II
<i>Acer trautvetteri</i>	II	I	V	II	I	II	II	II		II		I	II		I	I	I	II		
<i>Petasites albus</i>	II		V		I	I	I													
<i>Symphytum asperum</i>		I	V	I	I	I	I			I	I							I	V	
<i>Milium effusum</i>		I	V			II	I	I										I	I	II
<i>Adenostyles macrophylla</i>			IV	I	I	II		I												
<i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>			IV		I	I		I												IV
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>			IV			I														
<i>Tephrosia cladobotrys</i>			IV																	
<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>			IV																	
<i>Cerastium davuricum</i>			III																	
<i>Heracleum asperum</i>	I		III					I												
<i>Myosotis amoena</i>		I	III			I														
Ass. <i>Ilici colchicae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> subass. <i>vaccinietosum arctostaphyli</i> Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987																				
<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>				IV		I	I	III	I	I			II				II	II	II	V
<i>Phegopteris connectilis</i>				II			I													
Ass. <i>Ilici colchicae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> subass. <i>rhododendretosum pontici</i> Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987																				
<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>					V				I	V	IV	II	II	IV	I	II	I	I		II
Ass. <i>Abieti–Fagetum orientalis</i> subass. <i>athyrietosum filici-feminae</i> Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987																				
<i>Ranunculus bnhsei</i>						II		I				II						II	IV	
<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>					I	II														
<i>Lonicera xylosteum</i>						II		I			II									
Ass. <i>Abieti–Fagetum orientalis</i> subass. <i>piceetosum orientalis</i> Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987																				
<i>Hieracium vulgatum</i>				I		II		I												
Ass. <i>Calamagrostis arundinaceae–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987																				
<i>Calamagrostis arundinacea</i>	II				II	I	V								I		I			
Ass. <i>Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae</i> ass. nov.																				
<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>		I		II	II			I	V	I	II				I		I			
<i>Taxus baccata</i>		I							V						I					
<i>Euonymus latifolia</i>	II	I			I	I			IV	I					I		I			
<i>Polygonatum glaberrimum</i>		I							III											
<i>Pterigynandrum filiforme</i>		I							III											
<i>Snida australis</i>									III											
Ass. <i>Castaneo sativae–Piceetum orientalis</i> Palabas-Uzun et Terzioglu 2009																				
<i>Castanea sativa</i>		I			I				V						I					
<i>Tamus communis</i>	II	I							IV	I	I			I	I	II	I		I	
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>									IV					III	II	I	I			
Ass. <i>Fago orientalis–Piceetum orientalis</i> Quezel, Barbero et Akman 1980																				
<i>Carex panicea</i>										II										
<i>Poa annua</i>										II					I					
Ass. <i>Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetum orientalis</i> Eminagaoglu et Ansin 2009																				
<i>Astrantia maxima</i>	I		I			I	I	I				III							I	II
<i>Rubus plathyphyllos</i>												III								I
<i>Rhamnus imeretina</i>												III								
<i>Symphytum longipetiolatum</i>												III								
<i>Crepis paludosa</i>												III								
Ass. <i>Abieti nordmannianae–Pinetum sylvestris</i> Eminagaoglu et Ansin 2009																				
<i>Delphinium albiflorum</i>												III								
Ass. <i>Rhododendro ponticum–Piceetum orientalis</i> Palabas-Uzun et Terzioglu 2009																				
<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	I		I			I				I	I			III	I		I	I	I	
<i>Blechnum spicant</i>										I	I			II						

DISCUSSION

The results of classification and syntaxonomic analysis performed exposed two aspects at regional and global scales. At the regional level, two new associations (*Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* and *Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae*), as well as the previously described associations *Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 and *Festuco drymejae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 characterize the ecological and floristic peculiarities of communities from the north-western ultra-humid part of the Colchis. At the global level, some important results were obtained after a comparative geographic syntaxonomic analysis of the Caucasian and North-western Anatolian *Abies nordmanniana* and *Picea orientalis* forests associations. Two main syntaxa groups from these regions identified after cluster analysis (Fig. 4) show clear phyto-geographical differences and were interpreted as separate alliances. The associations from the North-western Anatolia (cluster A, Fig. 4) were previously assigned by Çoban & Willner (2019) to the alliance *Lonicera caucasicae–Piceion orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019. We propose to include the Caucasian associations (cluster B, Fig. 4) in the new alliance *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **all. nov. hoc loco**. The nomenclature type of this alliance (holotypus hoc loco) is the association *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov. hoc loco**. The floristic peculiarity of this alliance is determined by the group of differential species: *Actaea spicata*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Dentaria bulbifera*, *Dryopteris carthu-*

Table 2. Continued.

Syntaxon Nr.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
Ass. <i>Pruno laurocerasi–Fagetum orientalis</i> Quezel et al. 1993																					
<i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I					
<i>Hypopitys monotropa</i>	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	I	IV		I	.	.	.
<i>Viola odorata</i>	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	III		II	.	.	.
Ass. <i>Sedo stoloniferi–Piceetum orientalis</i> Vural 1996																					
<i>Polypodium vulgare</i>	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	I	.	.	I	I	III	.	I	.	.
<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	III	.	.	.	.
Ass. <i>Hieracio tossiani–Abietetum bornmuellerianae</i> Quezel et al. 1993																					
<i>Primula acanthis</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	I		IV	.	.	.
<i>Myosotis sylvatica</i>	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I		IV	.	.	.
<i>Ranunculus brutius</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I		III	.	.	.
Ass. <i>Parido orientalis–Piceetum orientalis</i> Quezel, Barbero et Akman 1980																					
<i>Arenaria rotundifolia</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.		III	.	.
<i>Cyclamen parviflorum</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.		III	.	.
<i>Euphorbia oblongata</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		III	.	I
Ass. <i>Telekio speciosae–Piceetum orientalis</i> Quezel, Barbero et Akman 1980																					
<i>Telekia speciosa</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		V	.
<i>Chaerophyllum macrospermum</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		V	.
<i>Alchemilla heterophylla</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	I		IV	.
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.		IV	.
<i>Oreopteris limbosperma</i>	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.		IV	.
<i>Cicerbita mulgedioides</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		IV	.
<i>Aquilegia olympica</i>	I	.	I	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		III	.
<i>Cardamine raphanifolia</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		III	.
<i>Saxifraga cymbalaria</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.		III	.
Ass. <i>Vaccinio myrtilli–Pinetum sylvestris</i> Quezel, Barbero et Akman 1980																					
<i>Potentilla micrantha</i>	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		I	IV
<i>Primula veris</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		II	IV
<i>Veronica capillipes</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		.	III
<i>Luzula campestris</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.	.	I	.	I	.		.	III
<i>Scilla cernua</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I		.	III
All. <i>Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae</i> all. nov.																					
<i>Fagus orientalis</i>	V	V	II	V	I	V	V	III	IV	III	II	.	.	.	IV	I	I	I	.	.	
<i>Rubus caucasicus</i>	V	V	III	IV	I	III	II	I	IV	I	.	.	.	I	.	II	.	.	.	.
<i>Dentaria bulbifera</i>	III	IV	III	III	I	II	II	I	.	.	II	.	.	II	II	.	I	II	I	.	
<i>Paris incompleta</i>	III	V	III	IV	II	IV	II	.	.	.	I	.	.	I	.	.	.	III	I	.	
<i>Senecio nemorensis</i>	V	I	IV	.	I	III	II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Polygonatum verticillatum</i>	III	II	IV	I	.	II	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Salvia glutinosa</i>	I	III	.	III	I	II	III	.	I	.	II	II	.	I	I	I	I	.	II	.	
<i>Ranunculus grandiflorus</i>	III	I	IV	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Impatiens noli-tangere</i>	I	III	II	I	II	I	I	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	V	.	
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	.	III	.	I	II	I	I	.	V	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
All. <i>Lonicero caucasicae–Piceion orientalis</i> Coban et Willner 2019																					
<i>Pinus kochiana</i>	I	.	.	I	.	I	I	II	I	.	.	I	II	V	.	III	.	III	.	I	V
<i>Veronica officinalis</i>	I	.	.	I	I	I	.	.	.	I	II	IV	II	II	II	I	III	I	.	I	.
<i>Cardamine impatiens</i>	I	.	.	I	I	II	I	.	.	.	II	V	II	.	II	III	II	V	III	III	.
<i>Lapsana communis</i>	I	.	I	I	II	II	.	III	I	I	II	II	IV	.	.
<i>Sedum stoloniferum</i>	I	II	.	.	.	I	I	.	.	.	I	III	II	II	.	V	I	II	I	III	.
<i>Cyclamen com</i>	I	.	.	.	II	III	I	II	I	V	.
<i>Daphne pontica</i>	II	I	.	.	I	IV	II	IV	.	.	II	.
<i>Dryopteris liliana</i>	I	IV	IV	I	IV	.	.
<i>Ranunculus cappadocius</i>	.	II	I	II	.	II	.	.	.	IV	II	IV	.
<i>Lonicera orientalis</i>	II	.	III	I	I	I	I	I	I	.	II	I	.	I	II	III	II	III	III	.	.
<i>Viburnum orientale</i>	.	.	.	II	.	I	I	.	.	III	I	III	III	II	I	.	.
<i>Lathyrus laxiflorus</i>	I	IV	II	.	IV	.	I
<i>Poa nemoralis</i>	I	.	.	II	.	I	.	I	.	.	I	III	.	.	I	.	I	I	I	II	.
<i>Aremonia agrimonioides</i>	I	.	III	II	.	IV
<i>Luzula pilosa</i>	I	I	I	I	.	.	II	IV	I	III
<i>Veronica peduncularis</i>	I	.	.	I	.	.	I	.	I	.	III	.	V	.
<i>Cirsium hypoleucum</i>	IV	.	IV	.	.	.
<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	III	.	III	.	.	.
Ord. <i>Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis</i> Coban et Willner 2019																					
<i>Abies nordmanniana</i>	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	IV	V	.	II	V	V	I	V	II	V	I	I	V	.
<i>Picea orientalis</i>	.	III	.	V	II	IV	V	IV	V	.	V	V	IV	V	.	V	.	V	V	V	.
<i>Festuca drymeja</i>	V	III	III	IV	I	V	IV	I	IV	I	I	.	.	.	V	III	III	II	I	I	.
<i>Galium rotundifolium</i>	III	II	.	III	III	I	II	.	I	II	II	.	.	V	IV	IV	IV	V	III	IV	.
<i>Hedera colchica</i>	.	II	.	.	II	.	.	.	V	II	I	IV	III	.	II	.	I
<i>Vaccinium arctostaphylos</i>	I	V	.	V	IV	I	II	II	V	III	III	I	IV	II	II	I
<i>Viola sieheana</i>	IV	V	.	IV	I	IV	I	I	I	I	I	II	I	IV	III	IV	III	III	I	.	.
<i>Valeriana tilifolia</i>	IV	II	III	II	I	IV	II	I	I	.	I	.	.	.	I	II	III	I	IV	.	.
<i>Ilex colchica</i>	.	IV	.	V	V	I	.	.	V	III	II	II	I	I	I	.	I

siana, *D. filix-mas*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Impatiens noli-tangere*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Paris incompleta*, *Polystichum aculeatum*, *Rubus caucasicus*, *Ranunculus grandiflorus*, *Sabia glutinosa*, *Symphytum grandiflorum* and *Fagus orientalis*.

The third group of syntaxa (cluster B2, Fig. 4) consisting of two associations (*Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006 and *Telekio speciosae–Piceetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992) includes floristically unique subalpine dark coniferous forests occurring both in the West Euxine and Caucasian regions and it can be considered as a potential new provisional alliance. However, there is currently insufficient data to accept this decision.

All described syntaxa of the Euxine dark coniferous forests (including the alliances *Lonicero caucasicae–Piceion orientalis* and *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae*) were attributed to the order *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019. However, the position of this order in the existing system of highest syntaxa is still uncertain. In previous studies, most authors attributed all dark coniferous forests of Anatolia and the Caucasus to the class of nemoral forest – *Carpino–Fagetea* (*Quercus–Fagetea*). Some authors (Quézel et al. 1992, Yurdakulol et al. 2002, Emin-agaoglu et al. 2007, Aydın et al. 2008) included them in the special order *Pino sylvestris–Piceetalia orientalis* Quézel et al. 1992 nom. invalid. Others (Korotkov & Belonovskaya 1987, Frantsuzov 2006, Belonovskaya & Morozova 2021) placed these forests in the order *Fagetalia sylvaticae* Pawłowski 1928. All these decisions were based on the fact of absolute predomi-

Table 2. Continued.

Syntaxon Nr.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<i>Rhododendron luteum</i>	.	.	.	II	I	.	.	II	V	I	II	II	III	II	.	III	.	II	I	III
<i>Acer laetum</i>	I	I	.	.	II	I	.	.	III	I	I	III	III	.	.	I	.	I	.	.
<i>Calamintha grandiflora</i>	III	II	I	IV	I	III	II	.	.	.	I	II	III	II	II	V	III	I	.	.
<i>Gentiana asclepiadea</i>	III	I	I	II	I	II	I	II	.	I	II	III	.	II	I	II	I	III	V	.
Cl. <i>Asaro europaei</i>–<i>Abietetea sibiricae</i> Ermakov, Mucina et Zhitlukhina in Willner et al. 2016																				
<i>Oxalis acetosella</i>	IV	IV	III	V	I	V	V	IV	.	I	II	III	II	IV	I	IV	II	V	IV	I
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	IV	V	IV	V	II	V	II	III	.	III	I	I	II	II	IV	IV	II	III	III	I
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	II	V	V	V	I	V	II	II	II	I	I	III	II	IV	I	.	I	.	II	.
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	V	V	V	II	.	V	I	I	IV	I	II	.	.	III	I	I	II	.	II	.
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	IV	V	III	IV	I	V	II	I	.	.	I	I	.	.	I	II	II	II	II	.
<i>Sanicula europaea</i>	V	IV	I	IV	I	III	II	.	.	I	II	V	IV	III	III	II	IV	IV	II	.
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	III	II	II	IV	I	II	I	II	.	.	II	V	.	II	IV	II	IV	I	I	II
<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>	IV	IV	.	I	.	II	I	III	.	I	.	.	.	I	II	I	II	I	I	I
<i>Carex sylvatica</i>	I	III	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	I	IV	III	I	II	I	.	.	.	.
<i>Dryopteris carthusiana</i>	.	IV	.	IV	I	II	III	I	II	.	I	.	.	II	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Epilobium montanum</i>	II	I	III	III	I	II	I	I	.	.	I	I	.	.	II	.	III	II	II	.
<i>Gymnocarpium dryopteris</i>	.	III	.	III	I	IV	II	II	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.
<i>Actaea spicata</i>	I	III	.	I	.	III	II	I	.	.	I	.	.	I	I	I	I	.	.	.
<i>Ulmus glabra</i>	II	II	.	III	I	II	II	.	II	.	.	.	.	I	I	III	I	.	.	.
<i>Circaea alpina</i>	.	IV	.	II	I	I	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.
<i>Daphne mezereum</i>	I	.	III	II	I	I	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	.	.	.
Cl. <i>Vaccinio</i>–<i>Piceetea</i> Br.-Bl. in Br.-Bl. et al. 1939																				
<i>Orthilia secunda</i>	.	.	.	II	.	II	I	II	I	.	.	.	.	.	III	II	IV	.	.	I
<i>Goodyera repens</i>	I	.	.	.	.	II	II	I	I	.	.	.	.	.	I	III	I	.	.	.
<i>Pyrola minor</i>	I	I	.	.	.	I	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	I	I	.	IV
<i>Moneses uniflora</i>	.	.	.	I	I	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	I	.	.	IV
<i>Pleurozium schreberi</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	III	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Hylacomium splendens</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Dicranum scoparium</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Linnaea borealis</i>	.	.	.	.	.	I	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Lycopodium annotinum</i>	.	.	.	I	.	I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Other species with constancy above 40 %																				
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	I	I	IV	III	.	II	I	.	IV	I	I	.	.	.	I	II	I	.	I	.
<i>Aruncus vulgaris</i>	II	I	II	IV	I	III	I	I	.	.	.	II	II	.	.	II	.	.	II	.
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	.	.	IV	II	.	II	I	I	.	.	II	.	.	.	I	I	II	.	.	.
<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	I	.	.	.	II	I	I	I	I	IV	I	II	.	I	I	I	I	.	.	.
<i>Tilia begoniifolia</i>	.	I	.	.	II	.	I	.	III	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	I	I	.	II	III	I	I	.	II	.	.	.	.	.	I	I	I	.	.	.
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	I	II	III	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	I	.	I	.	.	.

nance and high constancy values of plant species, typical for European broadleaved forests. However, Çoban & Willner (2019) and Bergmeier et al. (2019) noted that forests dominated by cold-tolerant dark coniferous trees should not be placed in the same class together with more thermophi-

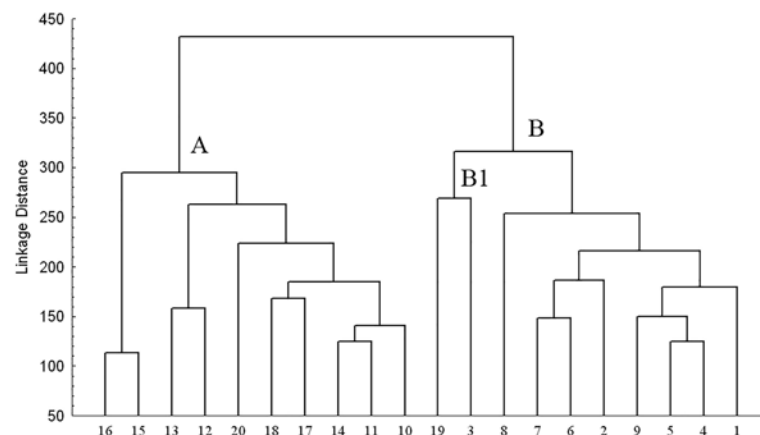


Figure 4 Results of cluster analysis (Ward method, Euclidian distance) of 20 syntaxa (associations, subassociations) of dark coniferous forests from Colchis and Northwestern Anatolia. Alliances: A – *Lonicero caucasicae*–*Piceion orientalis* Coban et Willner 2019; B – *Dryopterido caucasicae*–*Abietion nordmanniana* **all. nov.** Numbers (1–20) of lower syntax correspond to Syntaxon Nr. in Table 2.

lous broadleaved forests due to large physiognomic and ecological differences, even if there is some floristic similarity between them in the lower layers. Therefore, they placed the Euxine dark coniferous forests of the order *Abieti nordmanniana*–*Piceetalia orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019 into the boreal class *Vaccinio*–*Piceetea* Br.-Bl. in Br.-Bl. et al. 1939 following a similar opinion about the position of vicarious European order *Athyrio filicis-femina*–*Piceetalia* Hadac in Hadac et al. 1969 in this class system which was proposed in “Vegetation of Europe...” (Mucina et al. 2016).

We cannot agree with this solution because communities of the class *Vaccinio*–*Piceetea* demonstrate completely different ecological, floristic and some important physiognomic features compared to the Euxine order *Abieti nordmanniana*–*Piceetalia orientalis*. All boreal forests throughout their vast range in Northern Eurasia are characterized by the predominance of cold-resistant coniferous trees, characteristic boreal species of shrubs, dwarf shrubs, herbs, and a well-developed ground layer of boreal mosses and lichens. Of these key features, the Caucasian dark coniferous forests are characterized only by the predominance of dark coniferous trees in the canopy. All typical boreal shrubs, dwarf shrubs, herbs, mosses and lichens have a very low occurrence in described Caucasian associations or are absent (Table 2).

We believe that the Euxine dark coniferous communities of the *Abieti nordmanniana*–*Piceetalia orientalis* belong to a special zonal type of subnemoral forests widespread in Eurasia. They are fundamentally different from zonal boreal forests of the north, as well as from broadleaved (nemoral) forests of the south. Therefore we propose another concept of the position of the order *Abieti nordmanniana*–*Piceetalia orientalis*, namely, in the European-Siberian subnemoral class *Asaro europaei*–*Abietetea sibiricae* Ermakov et al. in Willner et al. 2016 represented in Vegetation of Europe... (Mucina et al. 2016).

Our concept is based on the following arguments. All these forests occur in temperate

zone and show important similar physiognomic and floristic features in Europe, southern Siberia and Northern Anatolia despite their geographical separations. Their upper layers are dominated by cold-resistant dark coniferous species of the *Abies* and *Picea* genera while deciduous trees occur as accompanying species (sometimes as co-dominants). Caucasian and European-Siberian subnemoral dark coniferous forests have a well-developed herb layer consisting of a significant number of common taxa (including dominant and constant species) – *Actaea spicata*, *Aegopodium podagraria*, *Athyrium filix-femina*, *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, *Carex sylvatica*, *Circaea alpina*, *Daphne mezereum*, *Dryopteris carthusiana*, *D. expansa*, *D. filix-mas*, *Galium odoratum*, *Epilobium montanum*, *Fragaria vesca*, *Geranium robertianum*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, *Milium effusum*, *Oxalis acetosella*, *Phegopteris connectilis*, *Polygonatum multiflorum*, *Sanicula europaea*.

The European-Siberian *Asaro–Abietetea* forests and some Caucasian associations (*Telekio speciosae–Piceetum orientalis* and *Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae*) are characterized by a significant participation of subalpine tall forbs. Typical boreal plants (characteristic species of the *Vaccinio–Piceetea*) are absent or rare there. The mosses layer, as a rule, is poorly developed or absent and boreal species do not play any significant role. European-Siberian and Euxine dark coniferous subnemoral forests are characteristic of temperate zone of the Western Palearctic and show some important similar bioclimatic features. They occur in regions with high precipitation throughout the year (in ultra-humid climate) and moderate temperatures. High snow cover (up to 2 m high) during winter prevents the soil from freezing but delays the onset of spring. Ahti (1968) and Hämet-Ahti (1981) attributed such subnemoral communities to a special subzonal type of Eurasian hemiboreal forests distinguishing them from zonal boreal and broadleaved vegetation. Similarly, dark coniferous subnemoral forests are presented as an independent zonal category on the Vegetation Map of Europe (Bohn et al. 2000). As shown by the results of the comparative syntaxonomic analysis, the Caucasian and Anatolian forests contain characteristic features of the *Asaro–Abietetea* more than any other class.

Prodromus of subnemoral dark coniferous forests of the Euxine province (Caucasus and Northern Anatolia)

Cl. *Asaro europaei–Abietetea sibiricae* Ermakov, Mucina et Zhitlukhina in Willner et al. 2016

Ord. *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019

All. *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae* **all. nov. hoc loco**

Ass. *Festuco drymejae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006.

Ass. *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov. hoc loco**

Ass. *Petasito albae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Frantsuzov 2006

Ass. *Ilici colchicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987.

Subass. *Ilici colchicae–Abietetum nordmannianae vaccinietosum arctostaphyli* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Subass. *Ilici colchicae–Abietetum nordmannianae rhododendretosum pontici* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Ass. *Abieti nordmannianae–Fagetum orientalis* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Subass. *Abieti nordmannianae–Fagetum orientalis athyrietosum filix-feminae* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Subass. *Abieti nordmannianae–Fagetum orientalis piceetosum orientalis* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Ass. *Calamagrostio arundinaceae–Abietetum nordmannianae* Korotkov et Belonovskaya 1987

Ass. *Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov. hoc loco**

All. *Lonicero caucasicae–Piceion orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019

Ass. *Castaneo sativae–Piceetum orientalis* Palabas-Uzun et Terzioglu 2009

Ass. *Fago orientalis–Piceetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992

Ass. *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetum orientalis* Eminagaoglu et Ansin 2009

Ass. *Abieti nordmannianae–Pinetum sylvestris* Eminagaoglu et Ansin 2009

Ass. *Rhododendro ponticum–Piceetum orientalis* Palabas-Uzun et Terzioglu 2009

Ass. *Pruno laurocerasi–Fagetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992

Ass. *Sedo stoloniferi–Piceetum orientalis* Vural 1996

Ass. *Hieracio tossiani–Abietetum bornmuellerianae* Quezel et al. 1992

Ass. *Parido orientalis–Piceetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992

Ass. *Telekio speciosae–Piceetum orientalis* Quezel et al. 1992

Ass. *Vaccinio myrtilli–Pinetum sylvestris* Quezel et al. 1992

CONCLUSION

A classification system of the spruce-fir forests was developed using the Braun-Blanquet method at local (the Colchis, Northwestern Caucasus) and global (the West Palearctic) scales. New associations *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.** and *Pruno laurocerasi–Abietetum nordmannianae* **ass. nov.** characterize dark coniferous forests from northwestern part of the Greater Caucasus. At the global scale, the results of comparative syntaxonomic analysis of the Euxine associations with zonal analogs from Central and Eastern Europe, Southern Urals and Western Siberia made it possible to propose a new concept of classification of dark coniferous subnemoral forests in West Palearctic. All described syntaxa of the Euxine dark coniferous forests (including the alliances *Lonicero caucasicae–Piceion orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019 and *Dryopterido caucasicae–Abietion nordmannianae* all nov.) were attributed to the order *Abieti nordmannianae–Piceetalia orientalis* Çoban et Willner 2019. The latter was included in the class *Asaro europaei–Abietetea sibiricae* Ermakov, Mucina et Zhitlukhina in Willner et al. 2016 representing European-Siberian dark coniferous subnemoral forests. This new solution is based on significant common floristic, physiognomic and ecological features of fir and spruce forests occurring in temperate zone of Western Eurasia.

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