



## Conservation status and management challenges of sub-Mediterranean grasslands in Bulgaria

Kazakova Y.

in

Kyriazopoulos A.P. (ed.), López-Francos A. (ed.), Porqueddu C. (ed.), Sklavou P. (ed.). *Ecosystem services and socio-economic benefits of Mediterranean grasslands*

Zaragoza : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 114

2016

pages 441-445

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=00007563>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Kazakova Y. **Conservation status and management challenges of sub-Mediterranean grasslands in Bulgaria.** In : Kyriazopoulos A.P. (ed.), López-Francos A. (ed.), Porqueddu C. (ed.), Sklavou P. (ed.). *Ecosystem services and socio-economic benefits of Mediterranean grasslands*. Zaragoza : CIHEAM, 2016. p. 441-445 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 114)



<http://www.ciheam.org/>  
<http://om.ciheam.org/>



# Conservation status and management challenges of sub-Mediterranean grasslands in Bulgaria

Y. Kazakova

European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP)  
Acad. Andrei Saharov Str.11o21, Sofia-1750 (Bulgaria)  
e-mail: yanka@efncp.org

---

**Abstract.** Semi-natural grasslands are a key component of the EU Natura 2000 network and its second most threatened habitat group after wetlands. The tools available to ensure their sustainable management are placed within the EU Common Agricultural Policy. A new mechanism designating and supporting environmentally sensitive grasslands was introduced in the 2014-2020 period. The paper reviews the conservation status of the traditionally used for grazing Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (code 62A0) in Bulgaria. In the 38 Natura 2000 sites where they are found, the combinations of the conservation status per parameter vary but the national conservation status is unfavourable-inadequate. Three sites are selected for an assessment of the CAP support eligibility of their permanent grasslands. The management challenges for ensuring favourable conservation status of semi-natural grasslands in the selected sites are: (i) overall declining levels of grazing; (ii) unresolved issues with permanent pastures definition and eligibility; (iii) lack of information on the habitat types in the agriculture datasets (iv) high share of municipal grasslands, which also have lower eligibility; (v) each municipality has its own pastures management rules and procedures, which complicates the situation in larger Natura 2000 sites.

**Keywords.** Grasslands – Conservation status – CAP eligibility – Official datasets.

## *État de conservation et défis de gestion des prairies sub-méditerranéennes en Bulgarie*

**Résumé.** Les prairies semi-naturelles sont un élément clé du réseau européen Natura 2000 et constituent son deuxième groupe d'habitats les plus menacés après les zones humides. Les outils disponibles pour assurer leur gestion durable résident dans la Politique agricole commune de l'UE. Un nouveau mécanisme de classement et de soutien des prairies écologiquement sensibles a été introduit pour la période 2014-2020. Le document passe en revue l'état de conservation des prairies sèches traditionnellement utilisées pour le pâturage en sub-Méditerranée orientale (Code 62A0) en Bulgarie. Dans les 38 sites Natura 2000 où elles se trouvent, les combinaisons de l'état de conservation par paramètre varient, mais le statut national de conservation est défavorable-inadéquat. Trois sites sont sélectionnés pour une évaluation de la PAC visant à l'éligibilité de leurs prairies permanentes. Les défis de gestion pour assurer un état de conservation favorable des prairies semi-naturelles dans les sites sélectionnés sont: (i) la baisse globale des niveaux de pâturage; (ii) les questions en suspens avec la définition des pâturages permanents et l'éligibilité; (iii) le manque d'information sur les types d'habitats dans les ensembles de données de l'agriculture (iv) la forte proportion de prairies municipales, qui ont également une admissibilité inférieure; (v) chaque municipalité a ses propres règles et procédures de gestion des pâturages, ce qui complique la situation dans les plus grands sites Natura 2000.

**Mots-clés.** Pâturages – État de conservation – Éligibilité PAC – Ensembles de données officielles.

---

## I – Introduction

Semi-natural grasslands are a key component of the EU Natura 2000 network representing 100% of Habitats Directive farmland habitats and 20% of all Habitats Directive habitats (Collins and Beaufoy, 2012). Yet 86.3% of them are in unfavourable conservation status, making them the second most threatened habitat after wetlands (EEA, 2015). The tools available to ensure their sustainable management are placed within the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), where a new mechanism was introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period. It requires member states to designate and protect “environmentally sensitive grasslands” in areas

covered by the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (article 45 of EU Regulation No 1307/2013). Farmers are not allowed to convert or plough the permanent grasslands in those designated areas. Furthermore, member states are required to prevent an overall decline (limited to not more than 5% at national level) in the extent of permanent grasslands declared by farmers (article 72 of EU Regulation No 1306/2013). This is closely linked to member state's approach to the design of the eligibility rules for pastures with landscape features and trees. The new EU guidance document allows pastures with more than 50% trees and/or shrubs used for grazing to be classified as "permanent grasslands with established local practices" (LPIS Guidance, 2014). The 50-tree rule is now increased to 100-tree rule, but a recent study in six countries on the CAP and permanent pastures reveals that overall the eligibility of permanent pastures remains a major issue of concern (EFNCP, 2016).

The aim of this paper is to review the conservation status of Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (code 62A0) in Bulgaria, which are traditionally used for grazing and assess their eligibility for CAP support in selected Natura 2000 sites. This is used as a basis for drawing on some management challenges for ensuring their favourable conservation status.

## **II – Materials and methods**

Two major national datasets are used for the analysis in this paper. One is related to the mapping, assessment and reporting of the species and habitats in Natura 2000 zones in Bulgaria. The datasets and reports are publicly available via the online information system for protected sites in the Natura 2000 network, set up and maintained by the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MoEW, 2016). The national synthesis report for the Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (code 62A0) in Bulgaria is used for the assessment of the changes in the total area coverage per site and the conservation status of habitat 62A0 per site.

Three main parameters define the conservation status per site: area (P1), structure and functions (P2), and future prospects (P3). The lowest score on any of the parameters forms the final conservation status of the site; however, the combinations between them are multiple. Thus, the selected sites represent two of the most common combinations: (1) a site in favourable conservation status on all three parameters (9 sites out of 38); and (2) a site in favourable status on P1 and P3, and unfavourable-inadequate in P2 (14 sites out of 38). A third site is added because it is the only one in unfavourable status on all three parameters. The permanent pastures eligibility for CAP support in the three sites are then assessed.

Permanent grasslands eligible for support are the second national dataset that is used in the analysis. A part of the Bulgarian Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) related to permanent pastures is publicly available online. It is set up and maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MoAF, 2015), and used by the Paying Agency for the land eligibility assessment and payment calculations of CAP support to farmers. The datasets are available at district level and contain information on the land use and ownership, permanent grasslands in Natura 2000 sites under the Bird Directive and/or Habitats Directive, as well as share and area of eligible parcels. One significant deficiency in this dataset is that there is no information on habitat types per parcel. Therefore, for the needs of the current analysis all permanent grasslands in the respective Natura 2000 site are analysed, which usually comprise more habitat types than 62A0. The derived management challenges are therefore applicable to more habitat types.

## **III – Results and discussion**

Bulgaria hosts an important share (45%) of the Eastern sub-Mediterranean dry grasslands (code 62A0). The rest are found in Italy (50%), Slovenia (4.5%) and Greece (no information is available) spreading across four biogeographic regions (EEA, 2015). They are in unfavourable-

inadequate status in the Mediterranean and Black Sea biogeographic regions and in unfavourable-bad status in the Continental and Alpine regions (EEA, 2015).

In Bulgaria, habitat 62A0 covers a total area of 25,369 ha. Around 92% of them are located in 38 proposed Sites of Community Interest (pSCIs) (MoEW, 2013). The summary of habitat 62A0 conservation status per parameter (Table 1) reveals that the “area” parameter is favourable in 30 sites. Despite the recorded decreasing area in 18 sites, only 8 are in unfavourable status by this parameter. The weakest parameter is “structure and functions” which is favourable only in 14 sites, and unfavourable-inadequate in 22. The “future prospects” are favourable in 31 sites. There are 10 existing combinations of conservation status per parameter per pSCIs (Table 2). Nine sites are in favourable status per all parameters. Parameter “structure and functions” is the reason for unfavourable-inadequate status in 14 sites. One site scores unfavourable-inadequate status on all three parameters. The selected sites are from these three groups.

**Table 1. Conservation status (CS) of habitat 62A0 per parameter (no of sites)**

| Conservation status (CS) | Area | Structure & functions | Future prospects |
|--------------------------|------|-----------------------|------------------|
| FV                       | 30   | 14                    | 31               |
| U1                       | 5    | 22                    | 7                |
| U2                       | 3    | 2                     | 0                |
| Total                    |      | 38 sites              |                  |

FV - Favourable, U1 - Unfavourable-Inadequate, U2 - Unfavourable-Bad.  
Source: MoEW,2015

**Table 2. Combinations of CS of habitat 62A0 per pSCI (no of sites)**

| Sites in respective combination | Area               | Structure & functions | Future prospects |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 14                              | FV                 | U1                    | FV               |
| 9                               | FV                 | FV                    | FV               |
| 4                               | FV                 | U1                    | U1               |
| 3                               | U1                 | U1                    | FV               |
| 2                               | FV                 | FV                    | U1               |
| 1                               | U1                 | U1                    | U1               |
| 5                               | other combinations |                       |                  |

Site BG00000322 Dragoman (CS FV-FV-FV) is located on the territories of four municipalities (LAU2) and hosts 6,273 ha of habitat 62A0. The habitat covers 29% of the site’s area and is one of its most important habitats (Gyurova, 2013). This is a site with a reported increasing area of habitat 62A0. Gyurova (2013) documents that trees and shrubs cover less than 10% of the habitat territory, with no specific issues related to grazing intensity. Site BG0001032 Rodopi-East (CS FV-U1-FV) stretches on the territories of 11 municipalities (LAU2). Habitats 62A0 covers 4,222 ha which is a decrease from previous periods. The unfavourable-inadequate status is due to the presence of three dominating species spread on 30% of the habitats territory (Apostolova, 2012). Trees and shrubs cover less than 10% of the habitat but there is an observed increasing trend. Grazing intensity is very low, which is another condition for shrubs growth in the habitat (Apostolova, 2012). Site BG0000624 Lyubash (CS U1-U1-U1) is located on the territories of two municipalities. Habitat 62A0 covers 265 ha, a recorded decrease from 460ha. The key reasons for the overall unfavourable-inadequate CS of the site are related to the progressive coverage of the habitat by shrubs and trees because of the drastic reduction in grazing (Petrova, 2012).

The analysed permanent pastures in the selected sites are not limited to habitat 62A0 because there is no such information in the LPIS dataset. Nevertheless, permanent pastures eligibility per parcel is highest (94%) in Dragoman (CS FV-FV-FV), and lowest (79%) in Lyubash (CS U1-U1-U1). Stating a link between the CS and eligibility will be speculative at this stage, since eligibility is not limited to habitat 62A0, but requires additional studies. In all sites, the majority of permanent pastures are owned by the municipalities, with a generally lower level of parcels eligibility for CAP support. In Rodopi-East, municipal pastures represent 72% of all permanent pastures, governed by 11 different municipal plans. In general, national legislation requires municipalities to develop annual plans for the management of pastures and meadows as well as procedures for their allocation to farmers and other land users. Each municipality develops its

own regulations on the basis of its experience and practice, but often this is insufficient especially in view of the Natura 2000 habitats needs. This makes municipal authorities a key player for ensuring favourable conservation status across the sites.

**Table 3. Permanent pastures area, parcels, and eligibility per selected pSCIs**

| Permanent pastures per site | BG0000322 Dragoman |              |                            | BG0001032 Rodopi-East |              |                            | BG0000624 Lyubash |              |                            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
|                             | Area (ha)          | Parcels (no) | Eligibility per parcel (%) | Area (ha)             | Parcels (no) | Eligibility per parcel (%) | Area (ha)         | Parcels (no) | Eligibility per parcel (%) |
| Total area                  | 6439               | 4823         | 94                         | 25182                 | 17043        | 83                         | 48                | 47           | 79                         |
| Private                     | 1309               | 3790         | 95                         | 825                   | 3529         | 92                         | 9                 | 37           | 81                         |
| Municipal                   | 3247               | 926          | 88                         | 18148                 | 11057        | 80                         | 39                | 10           | 68                         |
| State                       | 1746               | 68           | 82                         | 5832                  | 2184         | 79                         | 0                 | 0            |                            |
| Others                      | 137                | 39           | 89                         | 377                   | 273          | 88                         | 0                 | 0            |                            |

Source: Permanent pastures datasets for districts Kurdzhali, Haskovo, Pernik, Smolyan, and Sofia-district. Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2015.

In Lyubash, the LPIS for the area does not even include all grasslands as agricultural land. Only 48 ha of permanent pastures are found in the dataset, while only habitat 62A0 covers 265 ha. This illustrates the problem with the eligibility of permanent pastures with trees and shrubs, which is not unique for this site. The national figure for permanent pastures in LPIS is 881,895ha in 2015, while the permanent grasslands in the national agriculture statistics (BANCİK) is 1,368,665ha. There is a “loss” of almost half a million hectares in LPIS, mainly due to the eligibility criteria for CAP support and the different classifications used in the LPIS and BANCİK systems (Stefanova and Kazakova, 2015).

## IV – Conclusions

The management challenges for ensuring favourable conservation status of semi-natural grasslands in the selected sites are summarized as: (i) Overall declining levels of grazing; (ii) Unresolved issues with permanent pastures definition and eligibility (in one of the sites, they are not even included in the agriculture land dataset); (iii) Lack of information on the habitat types in the agriculture datasets, which would allow better identification of the land ownership, land use status, and as a result better management measures; (iv) High share of municipal grasslands, which also have lower eligibility, thus the CAP tools aimed at permanent pastures have limited use in addressing the problems; and (v) Each municipality has its own pastures management rules and procedures, which complicates the situation in larger Natura 2000 sites.

## References

- Apostolova I., 2012.** Distribution and assessment of habitat 62A0 in protected site BG0001032 Rodopi-East, Lot 6, project Mapping and assessment of the conservation status of habitats and species. Ministry of Environment and Waters.
- Collins S. and Beaufoy G., 2012.** Improving the targeting, monitoring and management of semi-natural grasslands across Europe – essential steps to achieving EU Biodiversity Strategy targets on farmland. EFNCP report.
- EFNCP, 2016.** The “green” CAP and permanent pastures - national reports (Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Ireland, Spain, UK) show a fundamentally flawed model, <http://www.efnccp.org/news/news20160127.php>
- EEA, 2015.** Conservation status of habitat types and species (Article 17, *Habitats Directive* 92/43/EEC).
- Gyurova D., 2012.** Distribution and assessment of habitat 62A0 in protected site BG0000322 Dragoman, Lot 6, project Mapping and assessment of the conservation status of habitats and species. Ministry of Environment and Waters.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2015.** Geographical coverage of specialised layer Permanent pastures per district. <ftp://212.122.182.203/>.

- Ministry of Environment and Waters, 2015.** Information system on the protected sites of Natura 2000 ecological network. In: <http://natura2000.moew.government.bg/Home/Natura2000ProtectedSites>.
- Petrova A., 2012.** Distribution and assessment of habitat 62A0 in protected site BG0000624 Lyubash, Lot 6, project Mapping and assessment of the conservation status of habitats and species. Ministry of Environment and Waters.
- Stefanova V. and Kazakova Y., 2015.** Country report on the implementation of the new CAP and its possible effects on permanent pastures: Bulgaria. EFNCP.