

more and more interested in their origin. Whereas they traditionally thought of themselves as just another ethnic group in the multiethnic Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, they are now discovering their origin by stumbling over the Armenian language—spoken by tourists and, more significantly, by members of ASALA¹ in the Turkish courts, and more recently by Armenians in the post-Soviet independent Republic of Armenia as well as Armenians in the Diaspora. For a very long time they lived in isolation in their communities and communicated in Turkish or in their own unique dialect. Now, they are more open to the outside world. They travel. They meet Armenians and see the similarity between their own dialect and the Armenian language spoken elsewhere. They see parallels to their own cultural traits—which they have preserved in spite of Islamization—in Armenian cultural practices elsewhere.²

The recent principles of democratization forced on Turkey by the European Union have also resulted in more lenient government policy toward Turkey's ethnic groups. This phenomenon is also instrumental in exposing the Hamshenlis to the world outside and spurring them to search for their true

¹ See *supra*, chapter 1, note 24.

² The group under discussion and relevant to the subject is the Hamshen Armenians in Turkey today, as distinct from the Hamshen Armenians, Christian or Islamized, who settled in the Russian Empire and suffered a different fate. For example, those in Ajaria (Georgia) were exiled to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan by Stalin in 1944. It was only after Stalin's death that they were allowed to have identification papers and passports, and even though they declared Armenian as their mother tongue, they were registered as Khemshens or Turks.