

PRESERVING HAMSHEN IDENTITY THROUGH SONG

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Hamo Moskofian, Moscow-Krasnodar, July 2012



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Hikmet Akcicek: In Hamshen dialect Vova means "who is it?" ("Ov eh?" in Western Armenian-HM). Our language is one of the oldest Armenian dialects. It's preserved in Armenian history for which we are proud of. Most of the Hameshens in the Eastern Hopa region can speak only Hamshen Armenian (Homshen), while in Rize and in the Western regions, unfortunately they speak mostly Turkish. Thus they are losing their identity. Due to the 400 years of Turkification, many have forgotten their mother tongue.

Our group's aim was to preserve our nation, the Hamshen community and identity, through our language. The easiest way was by music and by singing our centuries-old, marvelous songs about our motherland, our mountains, nature, love and marriage, and everyday life: age-old traditions in pure Hamshen Armenian. I think we succeeded in our aim and we are further developing our goal.

Our group is composed of male and female musicians and singers. I am an amateur, but the others are top professionals, who perform in several Black Sea regions. They play modern string instruments and drums. Some are Hamshen Armenians, others have Laz parentage on mother's or father's side. All of them excel in our dialect.

HM: Can you tell me about your political views and ideology?

HA: We are socialists. We oppose the ruling party in Turkey. My colleague here, Mehmet Altunkaya, is a social democrat.

HM: You are Hunchaks... (they laugh).

HA: Altunkaya has even a political party-- T.B.M.M.--which opposes religious fundamentalism in Turkey. Officially, we are Turkish citizens. "Turks" but Armenian, and will preserve our identity on the land that we have lived for centuries: the land called Hamshen. I have a pain in my heart; our countrymen are dispersed all over the world, from Turkey to Georgia, to Russia and to Kirgizstan. The first time we succeeded in meeting together on cultural and musical level was when a Hamshen band from Krasnodar participated with us in a joint concert. Our concerts had huge attendance all over Russia, in Armenia and in Lebanon. We would be very happy to organize concerts in other countries where Armenians live. We want to remind everybody that we alive and our language, music, culture is immortal!

