In the debate on the Jews and their autonomy that engaged French Sephardim and Ashkenazim and the government alike in the 1780s, all parties had in mind Joseph II’s policy of toleration. It gave support to the *Apologie des Juifs* (1786) of Zalkind Hourwitz. Ashkenazim and Sephardim in France referred appreciatively to this or that component of the policy. It served Cerf Berr in his campaign against *péage corporel* and it featured in a *mémoire* that the Sephardim submitted to the Malesherbes Commission in 1788. These repercussions are explicable in terms of the magnitude of Joseph’s project.

Joseph II involved his empire in a highly ambitious attempt to engineer a socio-economic and even cultural transformation of Habsburg Jewry: ‘to regenerate this people’, said the emperor, ‘that has hitherto concerned itself only with usury and led a wandering life’. His contacts with Turgot in Paris had persuaded Joseph that the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the expulsion of the Huguenots had contributed to the political and economic decline of France. Per contra, the tolerance extended to minorities in England, Holland and Prussia helped to account for their prosperity and economic advancement. Nearer home, the success of toleration in Trieste strengthened the argument. The case for the ‘civil betterment’ of the Jews that Dohm advanced in Berlin gained ground in Vienna. Joseph was in any case an admirer of Frederick II, and would attempt to follow the Prussian model in enabling the Jews to serve the state. But the humanitarian component, combined with the ideology of toleration, distinguished Joseph’s policies from those of his predecessors or contemporaries. ‘Inside the *kehilla*', so to speak, it is generally agreed, Joseph’s programme, with all its limitations, created a fresh and less tense atmosphere for debate. Despite every reservation, Joseph established a fresh agenda or at least gave impetus to an older agenda.

A series of patents, edicts and decrees dealt with the Jews’ circumstances in all the varied Habsburg territories – from Vienna to the Jews’ Town of Prague, the villages of Moravia, the port of Trieste, and newly acquired
Galicia. Each was the subject of specific legislation. Overall, the principle of toleration proclaimed that without distinction of ‘nation and religion all our subjects, so soon as they are accepted and tolerated in our states, take a common share in the public welfare which we desire to increase through our concern’. In the case of Vienna the edict emphasized a policy of education and the need to enlighten youth ‘through their direction [Verwendung] towards the sciences, arts and artisanry’. This included permission to take up an apprenticeship with Christian masters. Others were encouraged to open factories and engage in wholesale trade (as Grosshändler), and to employ unlimited numbers of Jewish and Christian servants (the former to be unmarried). There is particular mention of reading, writing and arithmetic, to be taught either in the existing German-language primary and secondary schools or in schools established by the communities. Hebrew was banned from all public transactions in favour of the vernacular. The compulsory wearing of beards as well as forms of special clothing and badges and the ban on attendance at public entertainments were all removed. This extended to the need for special permits and passes, the body tax and double judicial fees. Wholesale merchants and their sons could carry swords. Jews were permitted to leave their homes before midday on Sundays and holidays. This edict applied primarily to the Jews of Vienna and Lower Austria but it had relevance throughout the empire, especially in educational matters. Separate patents issued by Joseph during the 1780s corresponded to the circumstances of the particular communities. The patents for Prague and Bohemia emphasized the need for German-Jewish schools. These would be under the supervision of state-approved teachers and follow a state-approved curriculum that included ‘secular’ subjects. Where the community lacked the resources to establish its own school, the children would be directed to Christian primary and secondary schools. The poor would devote themselves to agriculture. They could also enter the haulage trade and work in the textile factories. In Austrian Silesia, a less generous patent required Jewish children to attend Christian schools (although the wealthy might engage private tutors) and merchants could trade only with the agreement of the guilds. The patent for Moravia made it easier for Jews to lease land and engage in agriculture. Here they could become master craftsmen, whereas in Bohemia this required the agreement of the guilds. It made school attendance obligatory. In Galicia, to which the Bukowina was incorporated in 1785, the number of Jewish agriculturists was higher than in any other province and the relevant patent aimed to strengthen this trend. The Galician patent of 1789 was the most comprehensive and liberal of all and freed Jews to become members of municipal councils. The patent abolished all limits on the growth and size of the Jewish population and declared that ‘all occupations, vocations and all branches of livelihood are open to them as to all other inhabitants of the province; and all restrictions hitherto in effect and