

Canadian embassies have till Sept. 15 to hang the Queen's portrait

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The Harper government, a staunch proponent of the monarchy, has ordered all Canadian embassies and missions abroad to display a portrait of the Queen by mid-month.

It's the latest effort by the Conservatives to demonstrate support for Canada's sovereign and part of a steady Tory campaign to champion more traditional elements of this country's national identity, including the military.

"Like virtually every other country in the world who display pictures of their head of state in their missions, we expect all Canadian missions abroad to display pictures of Canada's head of state, the Queen; along with the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and relevant ministers," said Rick Roth, a spokesman for Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird.

The instruction to install royal portraits in all of Canada's foreign missions – scattered throughout 150 countries – calls for the pictures to be in place by Sept. 15, a government official said.

The Tories acknowledged that most Canadian offices abroad already hang a portrait of the Queen but said the new order is "simply to ensure conformity" across the board. They declined to identify scofflaw missions.

Gar Pardy, a former Canadian diplomat, recalled one foreign mission where Canada didn't hang the Queen. "I remember that most embassies use to carry a picture of the Queen somewhere in the public area. The only exception was Argentina and there for obvious reasons," he said, referring to the Falklands War.

The Conservatives have repeatedly tried to build respect for the monarchy since taking office more than five years ago, putting an emphasis on hanging portraits of the Queen in places such as the Prime Minister's Office. One of Stephen Harper's veteran aides, Ray Novak, is a staunch monarchist.

Back in August, the Harper government restored the word "royal" in front of the names of Canada's navy and air force, reviving designations that had been discarded decades earlier. Defence Minister Peter MacKay championed the change as "celebrat[ing] our heritage" in the face of complaints from anti-monarchists and some Quebeckers.

Earlier this summer, Mr. Baird ordered colourful modern artworks by Quebec painter Alfred Pellon removed from the lobby of the Department of Foreign Affairs and replaced with a portrait of Elizabeth II.

Colin Robertson, a former Canadian diplomat, said the moves at Foreign Affairs suggest that it's Mr. Baird who has a particular affinity for the monarchy. He could not recall previous Conservative foreign affairs ministers driving similar initiatives.

"This is, I think, particular to the minister. I don't think we saw anything like this under [Lawrence] Cannon or [Peter] MacKay or [Maxime] Bernier," said Mr. Robertson, vice-president of the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute.

Officials said that while Ottawa could courier pictures of the Queen to foreign missions, diplomatic staff are also able to cobble things together themselves: downloading a high-resolution picture of Elizabeth II from a government website, printing it off on a photo printer and purchasing their own frame.