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Blockades by virus protest convoys banned in

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PARIS (AP) — Authorities in France and Belgium on Thursday banned road blockades threatened by groups organizing online against COVID-19 restrictions, in part inspired by protesters in Canada.

Citing “risks of trouble to public order,” the Paris police department banned protests aimed at “blocking the capital” from Friday through

violators.

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than \$5,000) in fines and a suspended driver's license, the police department said in a statement.

Online chat groups in France have been calling for drivers to converge on Paris starting Friday night, and to continue north to Brussels on Monday. There have been calls to action in Belgium for truckers to converge on the capital, which houses European Union institutions.

Authorities in Belgium banned Monday's threatened blockade, and said a wide perimeter around the city of 1.1 million would be set up to keep an excess of trucks out of the center of Brussels.

Brussels Mayor Philinne Close said

Convoy” protest because organizers

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A similar freedom convoy is planned in Vienna on Friday.

The protests would mirror those of truckers in Canada who have [blockaded border crossings and paralyzed downtown Ottawa.](#)



the Atlantic coast and Nice on the

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Convoy.”

Departures were also reported or planned in about a dozen other cities, with groups calling for them to converge on Paris on Friday evening and to protest there on Saturday.

Those looking to take part in the convoy appear to represent a mix of causes, and vehicles, from trucks to motorcycles and camper vans.

FranceBleu radio in the southern Vaucluse region quoted the head of a transport company as saying he and three employees would rally to Paris in separate vehicles. “It’s truly a peaceful convoy,” FranceBleu quoted the man, identified only as Sylvain, as saying.



referring to a COVID-19 pass France

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the country has a presidential election in two months.

While the vast majority of French adults are vaccinated against COVID-19, France has seen [weekly protests against vaccine rules](#) and virus-related restrictions for several months, notably by far-right groups. The convoy attempt comes as participation in the protests has waned recently.

French hospitals and older adults have been hit hard by repeated infection surges during the pandemic. Health Minister Olivier Veran said Thursday that was too early for people to let down their guard, warning the pandemic isn't over yet.

The French convoys do not appear

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include people who were active in the [yellow vest protest movement](#)

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2019 after the government responded to some of the participants' concerns.

The French protesters have been sharing images of truckers in Canada who have blockaded border crossings and paralyzed downtown Ottawa. They want an end to Canada's COVID-19 restrictions, including a rule for all truckers entering the country to be fully vaccinated.

Some are also calling for gatherings elsewhere in Europe, but it's not clear whether the different actions in different countries are coordinated.

A couple of Telegram groups in Spain are calling for gatherings and trying to organize logistics and food

