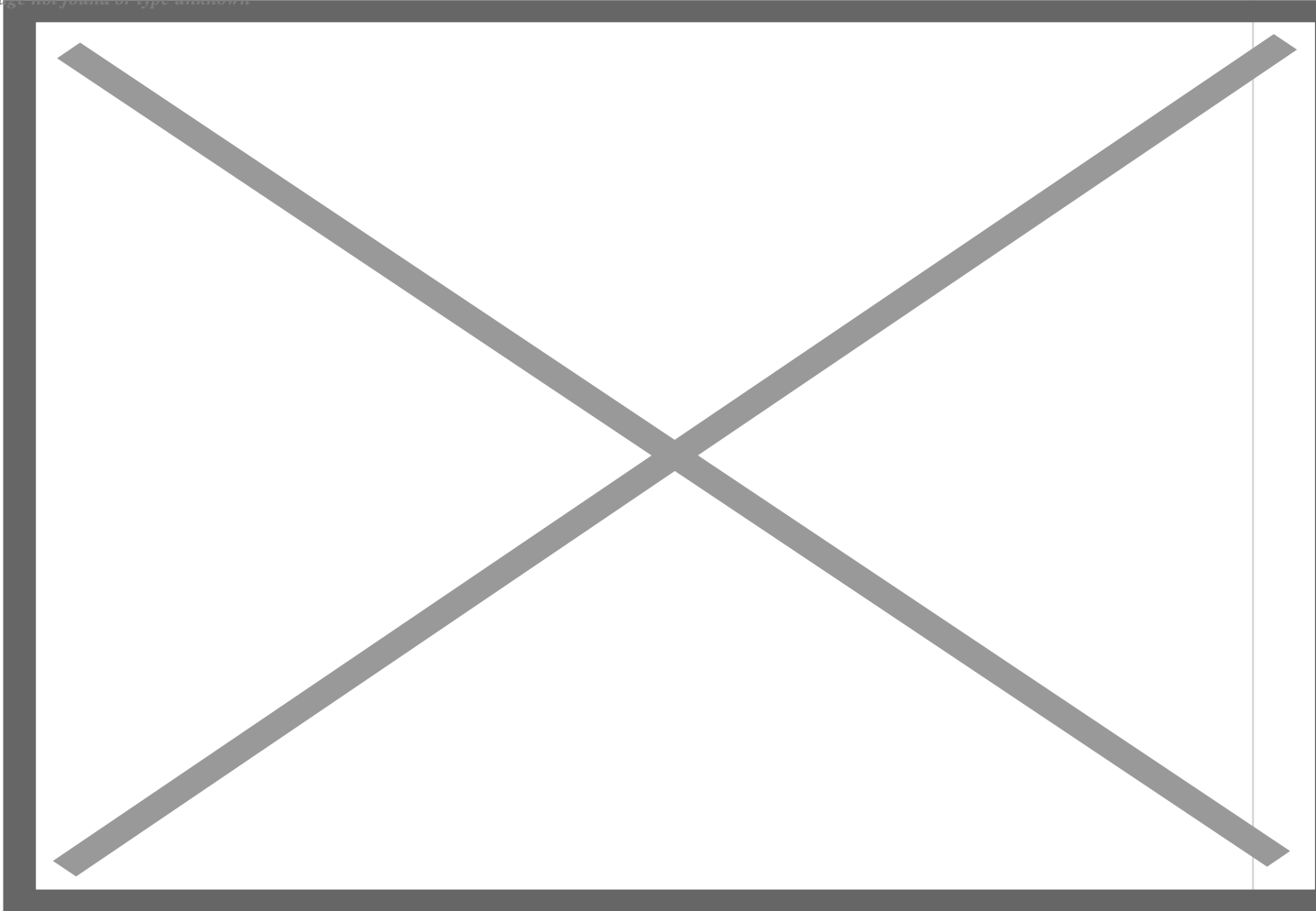


French police fire tear gas to stop advance of Freedom Convoy

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A demonstrator in Paris holds a sign reading 'Let's convoy our anger for our liberty' on Saturday [Sameer al-Doumy/AFP]

Paris, February 12 (RHC)-- French police fired tear gas at demonstrators on the Champs Elysees avenue in Paris on Saturday shortly after a "Freedom Convoy" protesting against COVID-19 restrictions made it into the capital.

Cars carrying protesters managed to get through police checkpoints in central Paris to snarl traffic around the Arc de Triomphe monument. Inspired by horn-blaring "Freedom Convoy" demonstrations in Canada,

the motorists waved French flags and honked in defiance of a police order not to enter the city.

Police told protesters to move on as some climbed on their cars in the middle of the roundabout at the top of the Champs Elysees. Earlier, police said they had stopped 500 vehicles that were trying to get into Paris and nearly 300 tickets were handed out to their occupants by mid-morning, police said.

Less than two months from a presidential election, President Emmanuel Macron's government is eager to keep protests from spiralling into large-scale demonstrations like the anti-government "Yellow Vest" protests of 2018.

Separately police also said they had arrested five protesters in southern Paris in possession of slingshots, hammers, knives and gas masks. About 7,000 officers have been mobilised for the weekend protests. Police have created checkpoints, deployed armoured personnel carriers and set up water cannon to brace the city for the protests. So far, the police blockade action has seemed effective.

The French protests are against rules requiring a vaccine pass to enter many public places and come after months of regular demonstrations against the pass in Paris and other cities in France.

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