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HEALTHCARE: 21 COUNTRIES TO MONITOR MEDITERRANEAN EPIDEMICS

(ANSAméd) - ROME, OCTOBER 16 - As many as 21 watchdog countries facing the Mediterranean Sea will have to monitor and keep tabs on the development and spreading of epidemics. A recently set-up network under the project Episouth, with the funding of the European Union, which sees Italy as the leading country for the coordination of the works with the Higher Health Institute (ISS). An innovative project, because even if it originates from EU countries, it involves non-member states in a public healthcare action. "The idea was to set up a network of epidemiologists in the Mediterranean countries, that is southern Europe, northern Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. Public healthcare does not have borders, not even in the sea, and the Mediterranean is an environment which is affected by the movement of goods and people, and not without consequences," Silvia Declich, from ISS, leader of the project, explained to ANSAmed. Italy wanted to offer its particular contribution at the management, institutional and financial level. She added: "Health Minister Livia Turco focused on the role played by our country as health ambassador in the Mediterranean. That's why Turco signed a convention with ISS and why the Ministry covers the quota of the funds concerning non-EU countries with 450,000 euro in two years. In Episouth, inspired by EpiNorth, a similar project developed in northern Europe, Italy plays also the role of coordinator." There will be three main action sectors, in which, apart from Italy, also Albania, Algeria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Macedonia, France, Greece, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey will be involved. Declich explained: "We are dealing with the emerging zoonoses in the Mediterranean with the risk of crossborder infection, that is those pathologies which have animals as incubation and transmission agents, such as Brucellosis, Leishmaniasis and Avian Flu. Then there are the problems related to preventable diseases with the vaccination of migrant populations and the epidemic intelligence." Besides these, there are a further two cross-section issues, such as operators' training and the setting up and development of the network through the website www.episouth.org. Each area is managed by a leading country through a small committee. These are: Greece for the zoonoses, Bulgaria for the diseases preventable with the vaccination, France for epidemic intelligence, Spain for training and Italy for the releasing of information and results. In each state there are two epidemiologists, the so-called focal points, or reference points for the network. "But it is obvious that they will rely on other epidemiologists according to the diseases, as they cannot be experts in everything," Declich concluded. At the moment the project is in the initial stage and therefore the experts are trying to understand what is the healthcare situation of each country and the kind of most widespread diseases, how the monitoring system works and what are the means on which they can rely. (ANSAméd).



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