Part I

Summary of the external trade statistics of ESCWA member countries
Introduction

Global trade performance continued to improve constantly during 2011 in line with the 2010 trend but at a slower rate after the 2009 plunge in both the global economic and trade performance that suffered negative growth for the first time since the beginning of the new millennium. Total world exports reached US$17.8 trillion with a percentage increase of 19.4% in nominal terms despite the complications of the new crises that affected many parts of the globe and natural disasters as the tsunami and nuclear incident in Japan, the continuing impact of the financial crisis, the deepening of the sovereign debt crisis in parts of the EU in addition to the developing Arab uprisings. The net impact of the said crisis was materialized in a shrink in global demand. In real terms, recent World Trade Organization statistics show a 5 per cent growth rate during 2011 in global trade measured by world exports that is a slower pace of growth from the 13.8 per cent real increase in trade during 2010 that was remarkably driven by the essence of stronger demand.

The ESCWA region generated large trade surpluses during 2011 as a result of the continuous increase of oil prices which reached US$107.5 per barrel on average compared to US$77.5 in 2010. Total ESCWA trade amounted to US$1.6 trillion in 2011 compared to US$1.2 trillion in 2010 and surpassed the 2008 peak of US$1.4 trillion for the first time. Following such recovery, ESCWA’s share of global trade increased from 8.3 per cent in 2010 to 9.1 per cent in 2011. On the exports side, ESCWA’s exports increased by US$304 billion with an increase rate of 39.4 per cent, while increase in ESCWA’s imports was US$92.2 billion at an increase rate of 17.3 per cent. Therefore, exports rather than imports continued to form the engine of growth of trade in the ESCWA region rather than imports as explained in table (1-1).

The highest exports nominal increase rate during 2011 occurred in Kuwait whose exports grew by 64.9 per cent, followed by Qatar 52.8 per cent, Iraq 51.8 per cent, Saudi Arabia 45.2 per cent, Bahrain 39.6 per cent and both Palestine and United Arab Emirates 31.9 per cent each. Syrian Arab Republic and Sudan suffered negative exports growth during 2011 as their exports shrank by 22.9 and 14.1 per cent respectively while Lebanon showed no change. On the other hand, Iraq claimed the highest increase rate of its imports by 28.5 per...
cent during 2011, followed by Saudi Arabia with 23.1 per cent, United Arab Emirates 22.8 per cent and Oman 19.4 per cent. Imports of the Syrian Arab Republic, Sudan and Qatar decreased by 22.2, 5.7 and 3.9 per cent respectively during 2011 as shown in table (1-4).

As for the region’s groupings, the share of the ESCWA region’s main oil producing countries (Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) amounted to 91.3 per cent of the region’s total exports in 2011 compared to the ratio of 73.0 per cent respectively during 2011 as shown in table (1-4). The region’s more diversified economies on the other hand did not produce any balance of payments surpluses during 2011 that reached US$517 billion compared to US$ 298 billion during 2010. The region’s more diversified economies exhibit far lower exports to GDP ratios that reached lowest level of 8 per cent in Palestine and highest of 27 per cent in Jordan. Sudan recorded the lowest ratio of imports to GDP 14 per cent while Jordan recorded the highest ratio of 65 per cent during 2011 as shown in table (1-3).

Table (1-3) presents selective indicators of international trade for the ESCWA member countries. It shows the high dependence of the majority of member countries on international trade to their economies. The main oil producing countries exhibit the highest ratios of dependency especially the ratios of international trade to GDP in comparison with the rest of the ESCWA more diversified economies. Generally speaking, the ratio of imports to GDP reaches the lowest of 13 per cent to a high of 64 per cent in Qatar and United Arab Emirates respectively, while the ratio of exports to GDP fluctuates between 61 and 78 per cent in Iraq and United Arab Emirates stipulating that around two thirds of GDP in this group of countries goes to exports. The rest of ESCWA more diversified economies exhibit far lower exports to GDP ratios that reached lowest level of 8 per cent in Palestine and highest of 27 per cent in Jordan. Sudan recorded the lowest ratio of imports to GDP 14 per cent while Jordan recorded the highest ratio of 65 per cent during 2011 as shown in table (1-3).