Libyan crisis could jeopardise Tunisia's chances to revive its economy (ESCWA)

TUNIS (TAP) - The Libyan crisis could have a negative impact on Tunisia's trade, the energy sector and tourism and jeopardise its chances of reviving its economy by 2015, according to a study conducted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) published last August 12.

ESCWA is one of fifth UN regional commissions, which Tunisia had joined on September 2012.

The study, which sheds light on the impact of the Libyan crisis on Tunisia and Egypt, focused basically on trade, particularly in energy, informal trade, tourism and Tunisian migrant workers remittances in Libya.

Concerning the trade of energy products, the study indicates that Tunisia "heavily relies on" Libya in this field.

Since January 2014, Libya has supplied the Tunisian market with gas and 605,000 barrels of crude oil thanks to an agreement signed in 2013. Until recently, Libya was supplying more than 25% of Tunisian fuel needs at a preferential price, the study noted.

As to informal trade, "the economic impact of closing the border is difficult to estimate but a simple evaluation can shed light on the matter."

In fact, informal trade represents the major activity of 83% of the residents of Ben Guerdane, the border crossing between Tunisia and Libya, and up to 20% of the active population in the region.

According to the same study, a report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that 10,000 to 15,000 of Tunisian families have received no income since February 2011, "which might be a consequence of the Libyan crisis."

Besides, various goods from China and Turkey enter through Libya because of custom and consumer tax differences of up to 78%."

As to tourism, Tunisia's vital sector, the total Libyan tourism receipts brought to Tunisia reached 890 million dinars, according to the study which referred to information provided by the African Development Bank (AfDB).

However, estimations for June 2014 show an annual increase of 5.3% and Tunisian tourism should again prove rather resilient, authors of the study said.

The World Bank estimates that formal and informal inward remittance flows from Libya accounted for 0.56% of Tunisian GDP in 2012. Their loss could affect "the private sectors and labour markets." In 2012, 40,000 Tunisian workers left Libya.

Libya is currently the scene of armed clashes between rival militias, which led to instability in the region.