

Vietnam

Economics Update

Inflation should stay under control in 2019

- Oil prices made a sharp reversal from four-year highs amid concerns about rising supplies and fears of slowing demand growth into next year.
- Assuming Brent crude oil price averaging at US\$75/bbl next year (Bloomberg consensus), we think Vietnam's inflation rate in 2019 will stay under control.
- We expect the oil trade deficit to widen but the budget deficit to be narrower than the government's plan due to rising oil prices.
- Consumption could get a short-term boost from the recent pull-back in oil.

Oil prices have tumbled c.27-29% from recent highs

Spurred by sanctions on Iran and a collapsing economy in Venezuela, oil prices reached four-year highs in early-Oct 2018. However, as the US government granted waivers to major consumers of Iranian oil, oil sentiment soured on the return of oversupply concerns amid rising supply and slowing demand. In 2019, we expect oil prices to continue to be volatile due to swings in oil supply but oil prices should remain well supported at US\$75/bbl in 2019 (Bloomberg consensus), not much higher than the average oil price in 2018.

Our base case estimates suggest inflation will be contained in 2019

For 2019, given higher environment tax on fuels and thinner petrol price stabilisation fund drawdowns, we expect domestic fuel prices to rise ~10%. This increase could add around 0.45-1.0% pt to the inflation rate for next year. Although inflation will accelerate, we think it will remain under control at 4.1% next year.

Oil trade deficit to expand next year

The oil trade deficit expanded from US\$4.8bn in 2017 to US\$6.0bn in the first nine months of 2018 (Vietnam turned into a net importer of crude oil in 2018). As we expect Brent crude prices to average US\$75/bbl in 2019 and Vietnam's oil production to decline further, we think the oil trade deficit will continue to expand and weigh on the overall trade balance. We project a trade surplus of US\$7.1bn in 2018 but only US\$3.4bn in 2019.

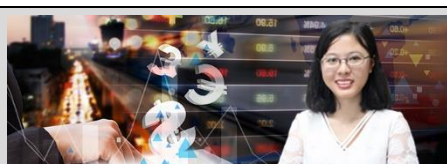
Only minimal support for State Budget at current oil price levels

Rising oil prices have become less supportive of Vietnam's budget than before because 1) the State budget is less reliant on oil revenue (3.5% of budget revenue in 2017 vs.13.5% in 2012); and 2) depleting mature fields and lack of new exploration and investment have triggered a decline in oil production. We estimate that oil revenue could reach VND51,500bn in 2019, assuming Brent crude averages US\$75/bbl. As a result, higher oil revenue could help the budget deficit to stay under the government target of 3.6% of GDP.

Consumption could get a short-term boost from oil plunge

According to market research firm Nielsen, Vietnam's consumer confidence remained stable at a high level of 120 points, implying that rising oil prices in 2018 have yet to

Economist(s)

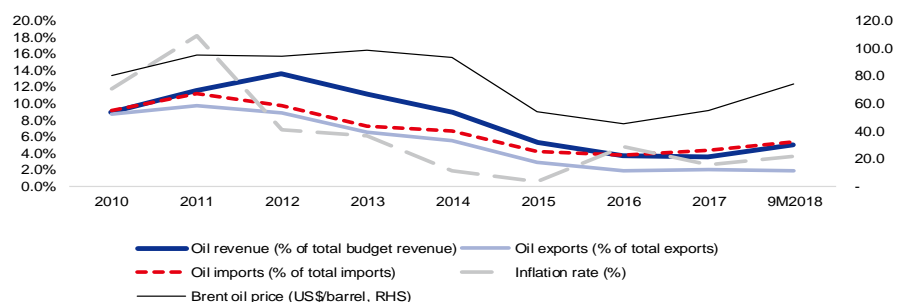


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Figure 1: Oil prices vs. Vietnam's key macro indicators



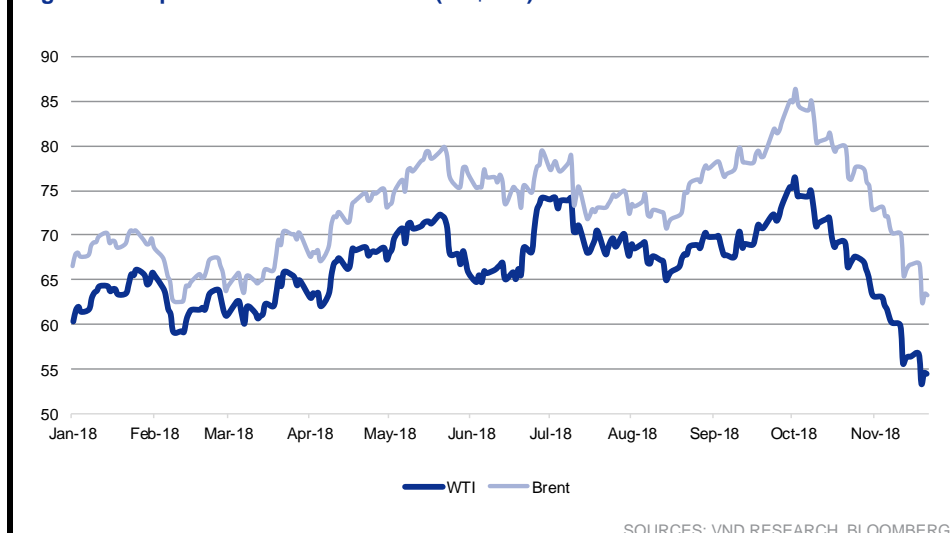
SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, GSO, BLOOMBERG, CUSTOMS, MOF

2019 inflation to stay under control

Oil prices made a sharp reversal from four-year highs

Both Brent and WTI crude oil prices reached four-year highs in early-Oct 2018 in anticipation of potential declines in Iranian oil production and exports as a result of US sanctions imposed on 4 Nov 2018. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), Iranian oil production fell by more than 0.4 million bbls per day (b/d) since May 2018 to an average of 3.4 million b/d in Sep 2018. In Oct 2018, the removal of Iranian oil from the market and supply disruptions in places such as Venezuela spurred expectations of large supply shortages in the oil market and fueled bullish market sentiment. However, oil prices went into free-fall subsequently as fears of a supply glut mounted. The Trump administration granted waivers allowing China, India and another six nations to keep buying oil from Iran. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, Russia and US ramped up output in recent months to offset the anticipated decline in Iranian output. Simultaneously, concerns about slowing global economic growth have cast a shadow on the oil demand outlook. The price of Brent plunged to US\$63.3/bbl, down 26.6% from its four-year record in early-Oct 2018.

Figure 2: Oil price movements in 2018 (US\$/bbl)



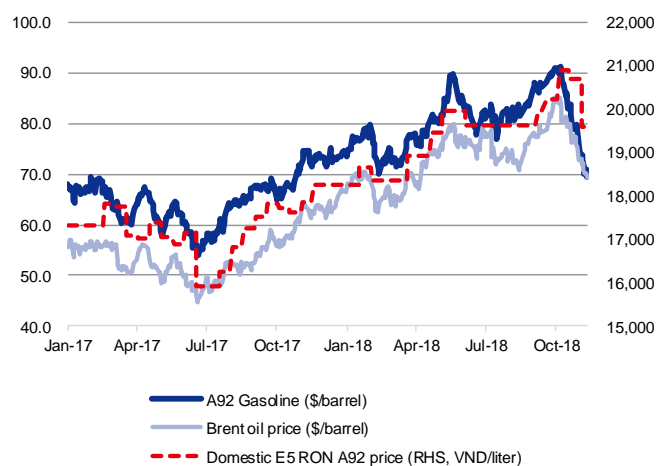
Oil market might see a demand surplus in 2019; uncertainties remain

According to the World Bank, global oil demand in 2019 is expected to rise at a similar pace to that seen in 2018. Meanwhile, the International Energy Agency (IEA) and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) revised down their expectations for oil consumption in 2019 in their latest reports, citing weaker global growth and the fact that higher oil prices, on average, may weigh on demand. On the supply side, IEA expects significant surpluses to build in 2019 as output from the Middle East, Russia and the US more than offsets declines from Iran, Venezuela and elsewhere. In combination with Iranian sanctions waivers by the US and steady demand growth, the oil market might see a supply surplus in 2019. However, there is considerable uncertainty about the total loss of Iranian production and the recent talk by OPEC producers of curtailing supply to counter Iranian sanction waivers. Due to recent oil plunge, it is likely that Saudi Arabia and OPEC members could cut production in their next meeting in Dec 2018. On balance, we are inclined to believe that oil prices will remain well supported at US\$75/bbl in 2019, which is not much higher than the average oil price in 2018.

Vietnam's inflation will tick up but should still be manageable in 2019

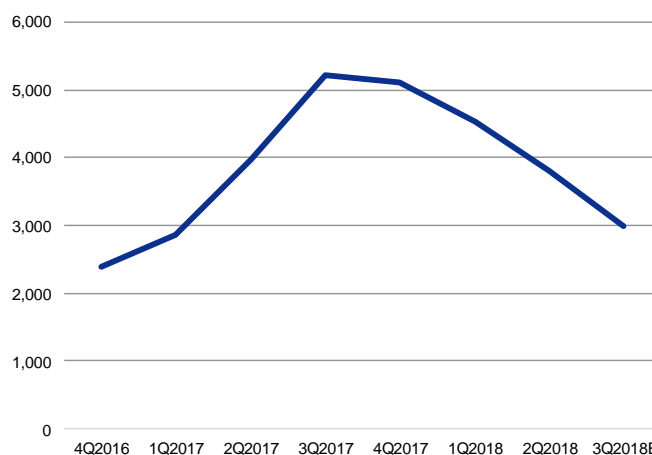
Currently, the government is pursuing a number of policy measures to contain the inflation rate to under 4.0%; these include reducing healthcare service fees and delaying the power price and environmental tax hikes. In addition, the government also uses the petrol price stabilisation fund to curb domestic retail petrol prices to cushion the impact of rising oil prices. On average, domestic retail gasoline prices rose by 12.8% yoy while international gasoline prices increased by 24.6% yoy, even as oil prices surged by around 38.4% yoy in the first 10 months of 2018. Thanks to the recent oil price correction on demand side weakness and Saudi Arabia's commitment to replace the lost Iranian oil production, we think inflation pressures could ease in the remaining months of the year. Therefore, we think a 2018 inflation target of below 4.0% is attainable.

Figure 3: International vs. domestic petrol prices (2017-Nov 2018)



SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, BLOOMBERG, MOIT

Figure 4: Petrol price stabilisation fund balance (VND bn, 2016-3Q2018)

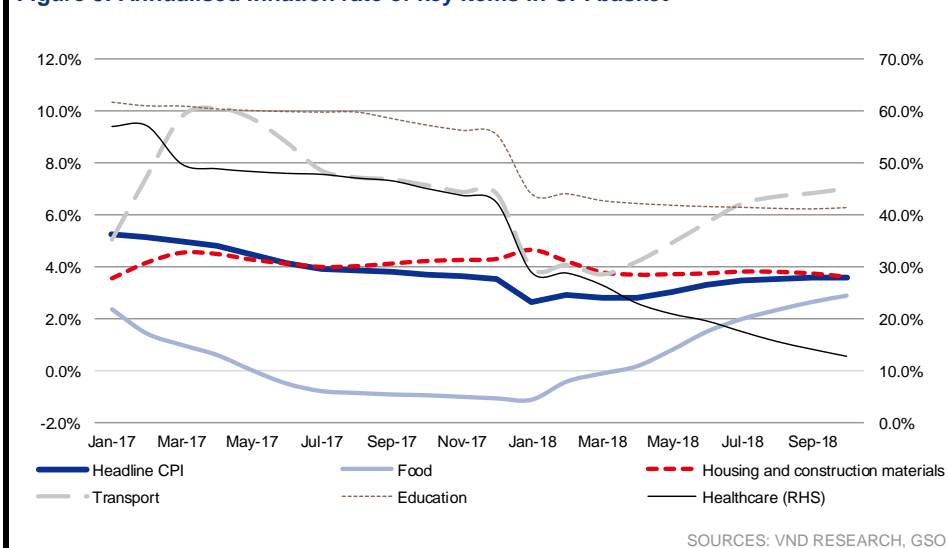


SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, MOF

For 2019, we see that inflation risks are tilted to the upside based on the following reasons: 1) healthcare prices should continue to rise in light of the government's subsidy reform though there was a delay in price hikes in 2018; 2) electricity price hike is expected next year due to rising input costs, according to Vietnam Electricity Corporation (EVN); 3) higher environmental tax on fuels will take effect on 1 Jan 2019 which will raise fuel prices by around 4.4-4.7%; and 4) the petrol price stabilisation fund pool has shrunk significantly due to recent draw-downs to cushion against oil price rises, thereby limiting the ability of the government to continue to delay fuel price increases.

Although petrol products make up only 4.0% of the basket of goods for CPI calculation, the petrol hikes will also have an indirect impact on inflation. In our base case, assuming average Brent oil price at US\$75/bbl in 2019, we estimate the impact on inflation rate to be 0.45-1.0%, including the impact of higher environmental tax on fuels and a decline in the petrol price stabilisation fund. The adjustments in prices of public services (healthcare and education) could contribute 0.48% points to CPI increase. Electricity makes up 3.0% of the basket of goods for CPI calculation and so if electricity price rises by 5.0%, we estimate the impact on inflation rate to be 0.08-0.2%. Overall, we forecast inflation to average 4.1% in 2019, higher than the 4.0% that we forecast for this year. In the Nov meeting, the National Assembly set a target to hold inflation at 4.0% in 2019.

Figure 5: Annualised inflation rate of key items in CPI basket

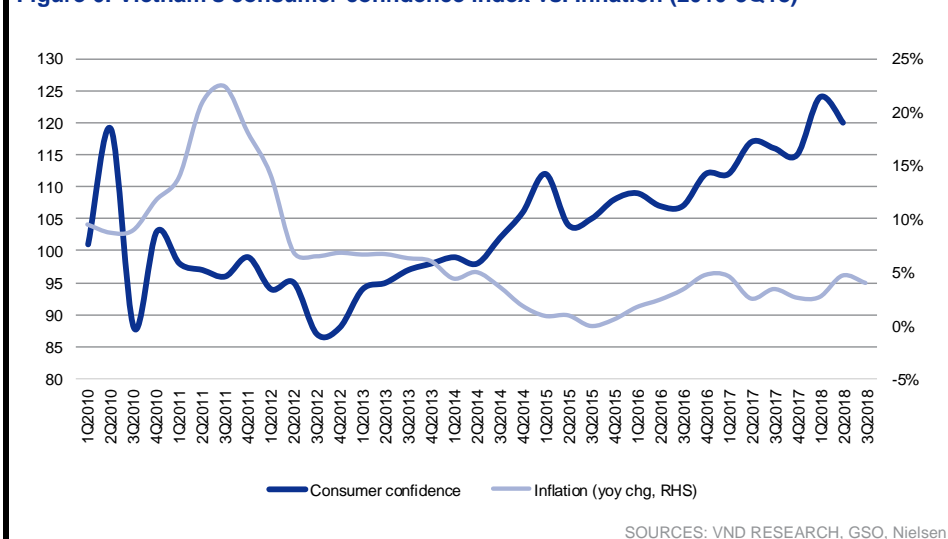


Consumer demand still not impacted by oil price rise in 2018

According to Nielsen, Vietnam’s consumer confidence remained stable in 2Q2018 with an index score of 120 points, implying that higher oil prices in 2018 are yet to dampen demand. In addition, the recent oil plunge could boost consumer confidence and retail sales in the upcoming holiday shopping season, supporting consumption growth in the final quarter of 2018. If oil prices recover substantially in 2019, there will be a tangible softening of demand, in our view.

In the worst-case scenario, if oil prices rebound back to US\$80/bbl and maintain at this level for a significant length of time, we think the risk of Vietnam’s inflation rate surpassing the 5.0% level will rise. This means the possibility of policy rate hikes will be higher in 2019 and the SBV could raise policy rates, consequently dampening demand.

Figure 6: Vietnam’s consumer confidence index vs. Inflation (2010-3Q18)



Trade surplus could narrow in 2019

Crude oil exports were historically one of the biggest contributors to total exports from Vietnam but the contribution of oil export turnover to total exports has declined sharply since 2011. This is not only because of the downward trend of oil prices and falling domestic oil production but also because of the structural changes in Vietnam’s exports, with strong increases in textile and electronic /

electrical product exports. In the first 9 months of 2018, crude oil and petroleum products exports brought US\$3.2bn in turnover, contributing only 1.8% of total exports.

In 2018, Vietnam has turned into a net importer of crude oil due to rising refining capacity with the second refinery (Nghi Son) having come into operation in May 2018 and a continued slide in domestic crude output. In the first 9 months of this year, Vietnam's crude oil imports soared to record highs (+186.2% yoy in volume and +282.1% yoy in value). Despite rising refining capacity, Vietnam still needs to import refined products; imports of petroleum products totaled 9.3 million tonnes worth US\$6.3bn in the nine-month period, down 2.1% in volume but up 22.4% in value from the same period last year.

Figure 7: Net crude oil trade balance (2010-9M2018)

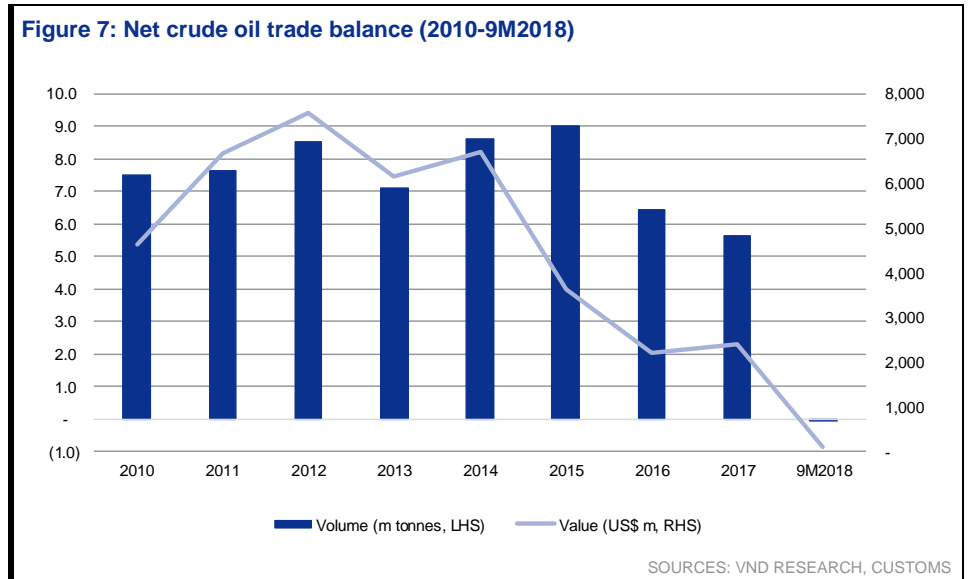


Figure 8: Export value of crude oil and petroleum products (US\$ bn, 2010-9M2018)

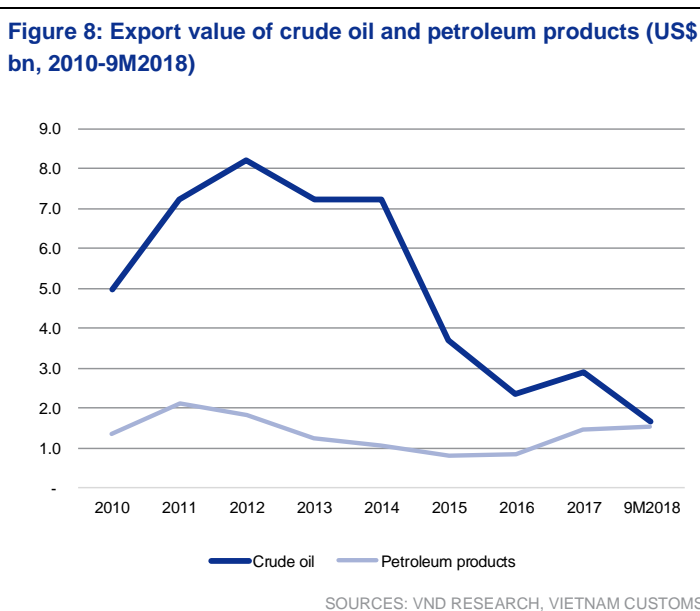
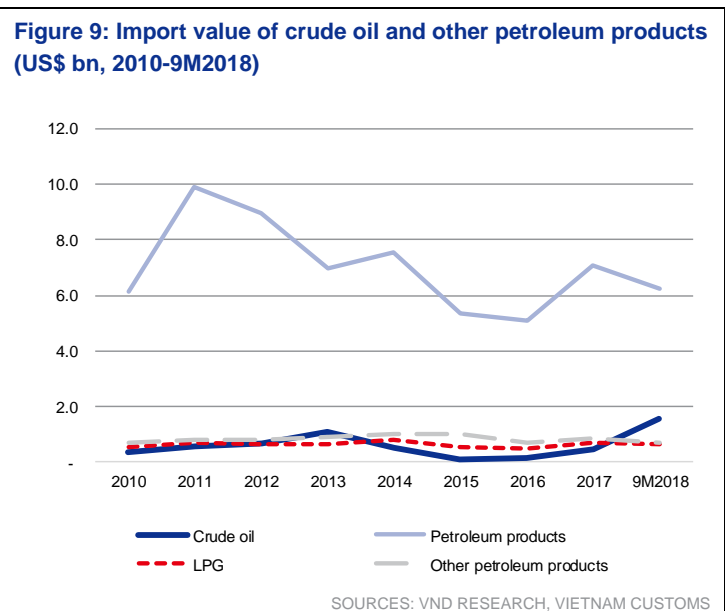
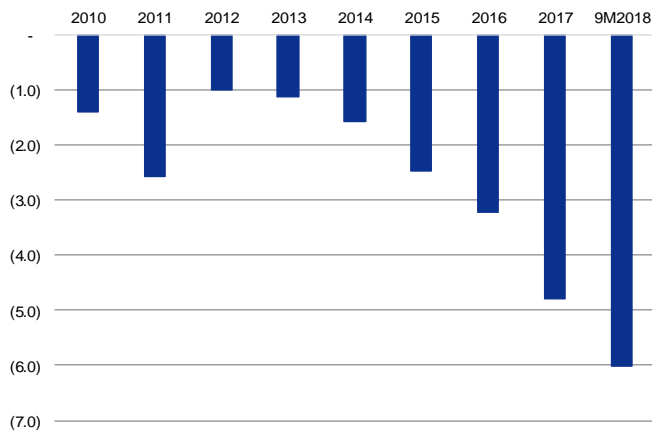


Figure 9: Import value of crude oil and other petroleum products (US\$ bn, 2010-9M2018)



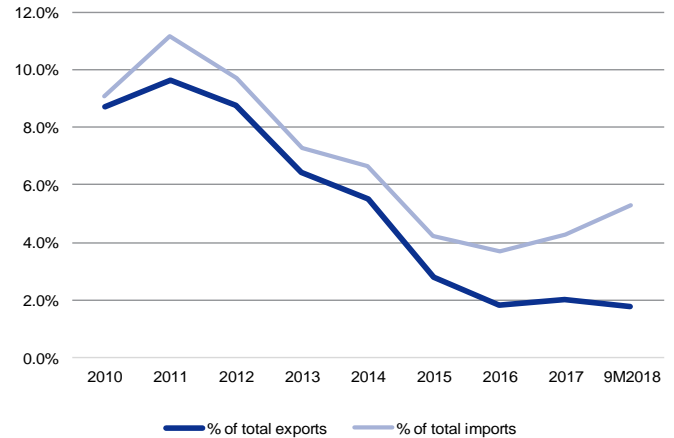
Because of rising oil prices, falling export volume but rising import volume, the oil trade deficit expanded from US\$4.8bn in 2017 to US\$6.0bn in the nine-months of 2018. As we expect Brent oil prices to average US\$75/bbl in 2019 and Vietnam's oil production to decline further, we think the oil trade deficit will continue to widen and erode the overall trade balance. We project a trade surplus of US\$7.1bn in 2018 but only US\$3.4bn in 2019. As a result, the current account surplus is likely to shrink next year. Therefore, the SBV will have less room to mitigate external risks and to protect the dong's stability in 2019, in our view.

Figure 10: Crude oil and refined products trade balance (US\$ bn, 2010-9M2018)



SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, VIETNAM CUSTOMS

Figure 11: Share of crude oil and petroleum products in trade value (2010-9M2018)



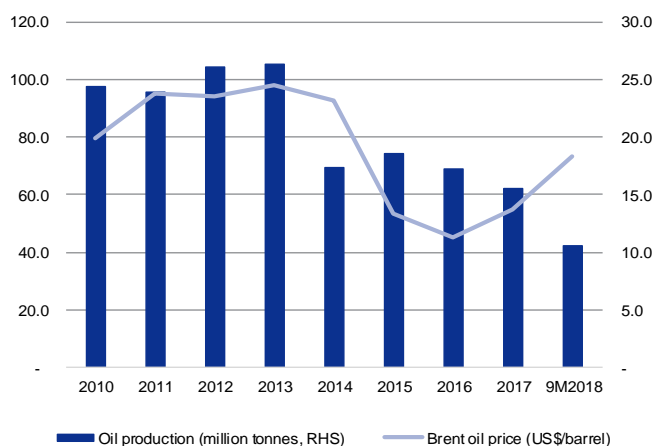
SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, VIETNAM CUSTOMS

The State Budget will only be supported marginally

We see that the State budget is less reliant on oil revenue (3.5% of total budget revenue in 2017 vs. 13.5% in 2012). In addition, depleting mature fields and lack of new exploration and production investment in recent years will result in Vietnam’s crude oil production declining by 10% every year until 2025, according to PetroVietnam (PVN).

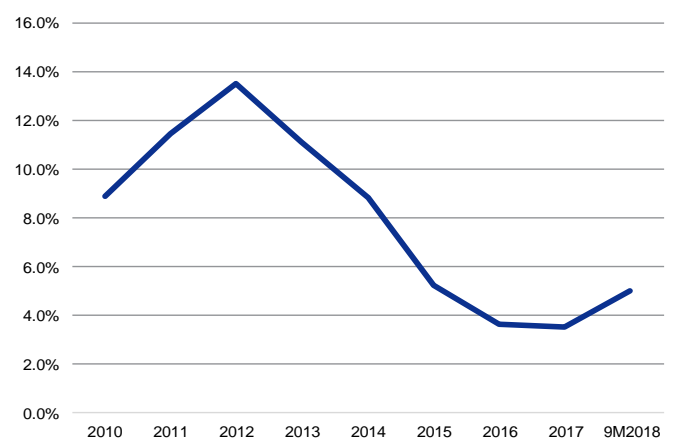
According to PVN, 9M2018 oil production exceeded the plan with an output of 10.5 million tonnes, but decreased by 10.2% yoy. Oil revenue reached VND48,100bn (+42.5%yoy) and surpassed the government’s plan by 34.0% due to rising oil prices before the recent sharp correction. In the next fiscal year, the government expects to collect VND44,600bn of oil revenue, assuming oil prices averaging US\$65/bbl. In our view, this plan is quite conservative and we estimate that oil revenue could reach VND51,500bn, based on an average Brent crude price of US\$75/bbl in 2019. Based on the current budget plan, rising oil revenues could mean that the budget deficit for 2019 comes in at 3.5% of GDP versus the government’s target of 3.6% of GDP, all other factors remaining unchanged. Despite the fact that the petrol price stabilisation fund is already significantly drawn down, we do not think the government will resort to funding fuel subsidies from the State Budget as fiscal consolidation is a key priority for the government.

Figure 12: Vietnam crude oil production vs. oil prices (2010-9M2018)



SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, MOIT, BLOOMBERG

Figure 13: Oil revenue (% of total budget revenue, 2010-9M2018)



SOURCES: VND RESEARCH, MOF

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Score Range:	90 - 100	80 – 89	70 - 79	Below 70 or	No Survey Result
Description:	Excellent	Very Good	Good	N/A	

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