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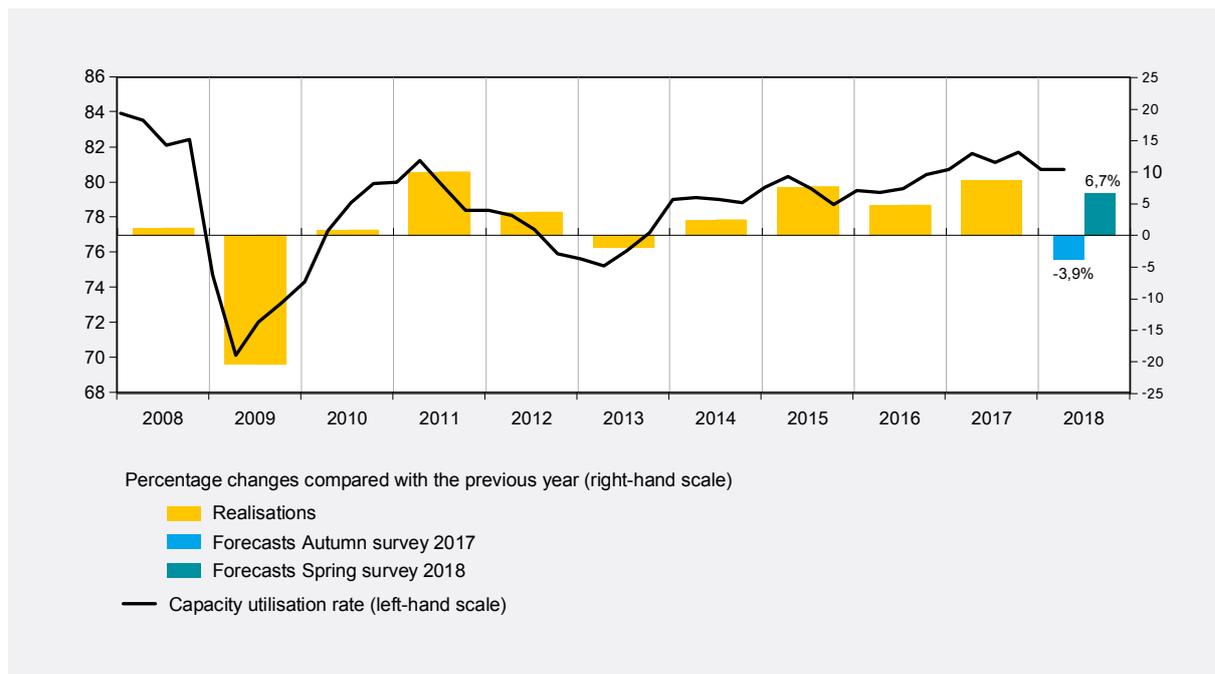
PRESS RELEASE

Results of the spring 2018 survey of investment in the manufacturing industry

Business managers still appear optimistic about investment

- Fixed capital investment in the manufacturing industry is estimated to have risen by 8.7 % in 2017, compared with 2016
- Entrepreneurs are expecting a further rise in their investment in 2018

TREND IN INVESTMENT¹ AND PRODUCTION CAPACITY



¹ According to the NBB's half-yearly survey; percentage change in investment expressed at current prices (excluding leasing).

The National Bank of Belgium carries out a survey of investment by firms in the manufacturing industry twice a year, in the spring and in the autumn.

According to the findings from the spring 2018 survey, fixed capital investment – expressed at current prices – is estimated to have risen by 8.7 % in 2017, compared with 2016. The dynamism of investment appears to have been particularly strong in the woodworking industry, in the technology industry, as well as in food and chemicals. With the exception of very large enterprises (employing 500 people or more), where investment is believed to have levelled out, investment is estimated to have risen in all the corporate size categories. The strength of investment in 2017 should be seen in the light of the global upward trend in production capacity utilisation rates since mid-2013. In October 2017, the production capacity utilisation rate had even reached 81.7 %, its highest level since July 2008.

For the year 2018, an increase in investment of around 6.7 % is still expected. In comparison to the autumn 2017 survey, which predicted a decline in the sums invested in 2018 of about 3.9 %, these provisional forecasts for the current calendar year have consequently been revised substantially upwards. This upward revision is mainly due to very large enterprises (with 500 workers or more), which have shifted from expectations of a reduction to an expected increase in investment, compared with 2017. In small firms (with fewer than 50 employees), on the other hand, investment is projected to fall. From a sectoral point of view, investment is forecast to gather momentum in the chemicals and plastics industries in particular. By contrast, companies are predicting a decline in their investment in the petrochemicals and woodworking industries, in motor vehicle assembly, as well as in the food industry, albeit it more moderately.