

Statement by Senator Barbara A. Mikulski

“On August 31st, Poland will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the 1980 shipyard strikes in Gdansk and the creation of the Solidarity Trade Union, the first independent union established behind the Iron Curtain. When an obscure electrician named Lech Walesa, working in the Gdansk shipyard, jumped over a wall proclaiming the Solidarity movement, he took the Polish people and the whole world with him, to bring down the Iron Curtain.

“This date has a special meaning for me, and for the thousands of Polish Americans who danced in the streets when Solidarity won freedom for Poland after decades of war and oppression. The history of Poland has, at times, been melancholy. Through the dark days of martial law under Soviet rule, Polish Americans stood by our cousins abroad, working to support the Solidarity movement. We found ourselves troubled and fearful for our friends and relatives in Poland, but we never doubted that Poland would one day regain its freedom. We knew that while Poland was occupied, the heart and soul of the Polish Nation could never be occupied. Polish people everywhere know that the heart and soul of Poland lie with democracy and freedom. So August 31st is a day to remember those whose heroic and peaceful resistance hastened the end of the Soviet Union and the emergence of one Europe, whole and free.”